Depoliticization, Securitization and Violent Accumulation in the Integration of the Greater Mekong Sub-region

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the relationship between violence and development in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) in mainland Southeast Asia. In the context of a regional development project that emphasizes enhancing flows of resources, finances, and people, this study explores the experiences of ethnic Shan migrants, among the most vulnerable people migrating within the GMS. Shan have been displaced from conflict-ridden eastern Myanmar only to become chronically at-risk as labourers in northern Thailand. This study illuminates why poor and vulnerable people are trapped in a vicious cycle of violence and poverty in both Burma and Thailand, regardless of national and regional development schemes aiming to reduce conflict and alleviate their poverty. More broadly, the central question is why violence is inherent in development.

This analysis is based on multi-sited and multi-scalar research that explores the ways violence is constituted by the entanglements of various political and socio-economic processes such as nationalist/militaristic nation-state building, insurgency movements, capitalist expansion, development projects and the securitization of borders at different sites and scales. The ethnographic research includes the experience not only of Shan in various locales, but also Myanmar soldiers, Thai bureaucrats, para-state actors, and ADB officials, all of whom, directly or indirectly enact violence on the Shan.

Conceptually and methodologically, this dissertation demonstrates that violent processes are implicated in complex webs of historical, cultural, political, and socioeconomic dynamics. The GMS facilitates the reproduction of capitalist social relations, in this case by transforming locally-utilized resource commons into regional resource spaces for commercial appropriation, transferring resource rights from local resource users to outsiders, and turning dispossessed people into disposable labour. Regional cooperation for resource sharing is constructed as ‘economics’ that should benefit everyone. The violence and displacement that made possible the to-be-shared resources, however, are construed as ‘politics’ or the domestic affairs of sovereign states in which no outside entity should intervene. As a result, the violence intrinsic to GMS resource sharing and cooperation is rendered invisible. Against the backdrop of interacting forces of ‘politics’ and ‘economics’ at different sites and scales, how politics and violence are rendered invisible in the name of regional economic development is central to this study.
Keywords: Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) Regionalization; The Asian Development Bank (ADB); Myanmar/Burma; Violence; Securitization of Migration; Development
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My research owes to numerous Ajarns (teachers) and staff from RCSD-Chiang Mai University. Being an Affiliated Researcher at RCSD allowed me to undertake my two-year long extensive field research and develop collegial experience with researchers in the region.

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<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMS</td>
<td>Greater Mekong Sub-region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KMT</td>
<td>Kuomintang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRC</td>
<td>Mekong River Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTA</td>
<td>Mong Tai Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCSS</td>
<td>Restoration Council of Shan State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHAN</td>
<td>Shan Herald Agency for News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHRF</td>
<td>Shan Human Rights Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLORC</td>
<td>State Law and Order Restoration Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSA</td>
<td>Shan State Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SURA</td>
<td>Shan United Revolution Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWAN</td>
<td>Shan Women’s Action Network</td>
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**Glossary**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>Lut Arr Pay</em></td>
<td>Forced Labour. It literally means “giving labour”. It has a sense of people contributing labour for good causes voluntarily, but the military governments use “Lut Arr Pay” by forced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tatmadaw (or) Tat</em></td>
<td>The Myanmar military is known in the Burmese language as the Tatmadaw or Tat. Tat also means military units.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Phar</em></td>
<td>Pleasing someone either verbally or financially in exchange for favour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pyidaungsu</em></td>
<td>Union (as in the Union of Myanmar)</td>
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The Greater Mekong Sub-region

Source: Chiangrai Times, 2015
PART I: RESEARCH PROBLEMS, CONCEPTS, METHODS
Chapter 1.

Introduction

1.1. Research Topic

There are many thousands of ethnic Shan from Myanmar who are working as migrant workers in Northern Thailand. Because of a lack of legal status, education and professional skills, most end up as low paid general construction workers, farm labourers, waiters/waitresses, security guards, cleaners, and domestic and sex workers. Typical of the experiences of migrant workers around the world, they endure poverty and various forms of violence at the hands of employers and authorities in the form of torture, murder, arrest, extortion and various other discriminatory acts including denial of citizenship, health care, compensation and social security (HRW, 2010). While these Shan migrants were still in Myanmar (also known as Burma), they faced violence enacted by Burmese military soldiers. The forms of violence there included sexual violence, torture, mass murder, extortion, involuntary mass relocation and forced labour (SWAN, 2002; ND-Burma, 2010; 2014; NCGUB, 2008; SHRF, 1998).

All these forms of violence happened amidst mushrooming national development schemes initiated by both governments and regional bodies such as the Greater Mekong Sub-region development cooperation (hereafter GMS), that were designed to promote economic growth and the wellbeing of poor, marginalized and disenfranchised people. Myanmar, for example, established the Ministry of Progress of Border Areas, National Races and Development Affairs in 1992 (later renamed to the Ministry of Border Affairs) (Soe, 2011). In the same year, six countries sharing the Mekong River (Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and China) agreed on the Greater Mekong Sub-region cooperation program for development (ADB, 2013). Even after more than two decades of these development initiatives, ethnic minority people such as the Shan are still living in the midst of poverty and violence. The question then is, how are these development schemes related to violence?
The relationship between development and violence is the central theme of this dissertation. In particular, it is about how and why certain politically and economically vulnerable minority populations are subjected to various forms of violence and dispossession despite development schemes that are aimed to promote economic growth and wellbeing. This study investigates the way violence is constituted, the forms it takes, and the way supposedly conflict-reducing development programs, aiming to ‘help’ these people, are in fact in part constitutive of this violence.

This study is situated in the context of the Greater Mekong Sub-region development cooperation program sponsored by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The program encompasses six countries - Myanmar (formerly Burma), Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Yunnan and Guanxi provinces of China. The geographic case study, however, is limited to the borderlands between Myanmar and Thailand, charting locally specific socio-political processes in the national and regional grids of political and socio-economic transformations in the Greater Mekong Sub-region.

The primary population addressed is minority people from the Shan State in eastern Myanmar, mostly ethnic Shan, who are now working as ‘irregular’ migrants in northern Thailand. In the 1990s and 2000s, between 300,000 to 500,000 ethnic Shan from eastern Myanmar were dispossessed of their land by military conflict and its devastating effects on livelihood opportunities in Myanmar (SHRF, 1998; Risser et al, 2003). Once these people crossed the international border into Thailand, they faced economic exploitation, violence and extortion by employers and government officials.

This dissertation aims to unsettle the official discourses of “peace-time” cooperation for development in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) by recasting the GMS as an inherently violent political project. The GMS is a violent political project because -- whether intended or not -- it enables transnational ruling blocs¹ to wage a market-centric ‘development’ war on the poor. I term this a war because it takes away critical resources from local users. In sum, the workings of the GMS enable ruling classes

¹ Those who govern the GMS are state officials from each member states, as well as technocrats, bureaucrats, experts, donors and private investors who are from and beyond GMS.
with poor human rights records to secure economic building blocks of their political and 'national' territorial monopoly by exploiting resources against the will, and at the expense of, 'local' people who depend on the resources for their livelihoods and even for their survival.

Yet, this study does not intend to single out the ruling blocs from each GMS country or the coalition of the blocs across the region as the villains. Neither does it look for answers in the workings of the ADB or its political will and institutional constraints. It does not seek clues in limitations of development practitioners and the systemic error of development as an enterprise. Scholars have already provided robust analyses of these problems (e.g. Ferguson, 1990; Mitchell, 2002; Uvin, 1998). The purpose of this research is rather to explore the complex web of events and relations – rather than any particular coalition or institution – to enhance an analytical understanding of a cycle of violence experienced by vulnerable inhabitants in the region. In addition, instead of studying how poverty reduction efforts (i.e. development) could or, to what extent, do reduce violence, this research rather explores the ways in which the forces of development interact with those of violence.

This study is based on a multi-sited and multi-scale analysis. Field research was conducted from 2010 to 2013, but intensive fieldwork was conducted in 2010 and 2011. Since 2011, the political environment in Myanmar has changed since the new civilian government led by ex-general Thein Sein took the presidential office under the new 2008 Constitution. The political skilfulness of the ruling bloc (civilian government with western educated PhDs as key presidential advisors and the military on the backstage) has successfully persuaded the ADB to abandon its earlier non-direct assistance policy. The ADB has restarted full operation in Myanmar since early 2013. The Asian Development Bank is committed to providing direct financial and technical assistance to Myanmar, alongside the World Bank and the IMF.

2 Some argue that the president and the military are competing for power, while some argue that the president’s office and the military run the country collectively but playing a good cop, bad cop routine (Lintner, 2012).
3 Because of international economic sanctions against the Burmese junta due to human rights abuses, the Bank did not lend money. It provided non-direct assistance that are technical studies and supports, not financial grants or loans.
This analysis, however, is limited largely to the political context prior to 2012 when the ADB’s engagement with Myanmar was much more indirect. Before 2011, the ADB did not openly engage or provide direct development assistance to the government of Myanmar. The Bank, however, maintained ties with the Myanmar government and provided indirect assistance, which has led human right groups to consistently accuse the Bank of supporting an oppressive, authoritarian regime.

This research explores several transnational thematic processes in the context of the GMS. The aspects of the Greater Mekong Sub-region development program relevant to this study are:

- The planned Tasang hydropower dam project in the Shan State, eastern Myanmar, which is being pursued by public and private sectors from Myanmar, China and Thailand. The project area has been a site of military conflict, especially since 1996 when the Burmese army’s counterinsurgency operations against an ethnic armed organization, the Shan State Army (South), led to mass displacement of local people.
- The governance of refugees and migrants in Thailand.
- The GMS program’s operational culture in regard to regional resource sharing and migration.

1.2. Analytical Problems

Conceptually, this dissertation problematizes the emerging conceptual and methodological approach to violence and poverty articulated by global policy institutions including the World Bank and the individuals and organizations that shape the global policy discourses on poverty and violence (e.g. Collier et al, 2004; Sambanis, 2002). It is important to challenge these policy analyses linking poverty to violence. While critical scholars in development studies see violence as inherent to development (Sen, 2008; Kothari et al., 2004; Escobar, 2004; Esteva, 1987), economic policy analysis continues to influence planners, national policy makers and financial institutions’ understanding of what perpetuates violence in today’s world. Since these leaders decide strategies of intervention, it is crucial to scrutinize policy discourses that inform these decision-makers.

4 Indirect assistance means Technical Assistance, such as feasibility studies, given to Myanmar alongside other countries as a group.
Previous studies on poverty and violence assumed that violence and crime are characteristic of the world of the poor. Looking through the lens of modernization theory, these studies suggest that the rate of violence declines as the economy grows or develops (see, for example, Arthur & Marenin, 1995). This understanding has been challenged by empirical studies in developing countries, showing that such interpretations are ethnocentric and simplistic (e.g. Escobar, 2004). Still, global policy institutions and related policy research networks seem to be stuck in the earlier understanding about poverty and violence. The World Bank’s 2011 World Development Report is a prime example. The report, entitled “Conflict, Security and Development”, identifies three stresses - security, economy, and justice – that drive civil conflicts. Poverty – in particular unemployment – is highlighted as the most important factor that drives people into armed conflict (World Bank, 2011). Although the report is cautious about making correlations and causalities between poverty and armed conflict, it nevertheless emphasizes such economic factors as poverty, unemployment and inequality as major factors contributing to chronic violence.

The report draws findings from the body of literature that approaches the issue of poverty and violence in terms of statistical regression analyses (e.g. Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). Four main points can be drawn from this body of literature.

**One: Poverty-Centrism**

While details differ from one study to another with varying levels of nuance, the overarching arguments, implicitly or explicitly, indicate that poverty and unemployment explain why and to what extent people engage in violence. In other words, the common trend in these analyses is that poor countries with low per capital income are at a higher risk of conflict. For instance, Do and Iyer, economists from the World Bank and the Harvard Business School, respectively, argue in their study on Nepal, that “economic backwardness is associated with higher levels of conflict” (Do & Iyer, 2010:741). They indicate that, “conflict-related deaths are significantly higher in poorer districts… [and that] a 10 percentage point increase in poverty is associated with 25-27 additional conflict-related deaths” (Do & Iyer, 2010:735). Similarly, Fisman and Miguel (2008), from Columbia University and University of California (Berkeley), respectively, argue that an income drop of 5% increases the risk of conflict by 30% the following year.
Although such versions of economic reductionism have received criticism (Peluso & Watts, 2001; Sen, 2008; Watts, 2009), the trend has been sustained by micro-level statistical studies and regression analyses. Their methodological approaches focus on statistically experimenting with how and which variables cause and sustain conflicts, while economic variables are used one way or another to show that economic conditions explain violence (see e.g. Justino, 2012; Justino & Verwimp, 2008; Holtermann, 2012). For instance, Patricia Justino argues that the higher the vulnerability to poverty, “the higher is the probability of the household participating and supporting an armed group” (2009: 324). Sambanis even argues that civil conflict is a “problem of the poor” (Sambanis, 2002:216).

Perhaps this way of thinking that informs global policy discourse is the legacy of the ‘economic opportunity cost’ thesis by Collier and Hoeffler (2004), who argue that poverty allows insurgency groups to recruit fighters cheaply, since there are poor people who may gain more from being fighters than being unemployed or having a low return from farming. Their overall finding is that:

[Political and social variables that are most obviously related to grievance have little explanatory power. By contrast, economic variables, which could proxy some grievances but are perhaps more obviously related to the viability of rebellion, provide considerably more explanatory power (2004:563).]

Humphreys and Weinstein similarly argue that the majority of combatants in Sierra Leone (both government and insurgency sides) are uneducated and very poor, and thus they are available to be recruited into rebellion with low financial reward (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008).

There are visible relationships between poverty and violence, since many countries experiencing violence are ‘poor’. Nonetheless, the relationships as well as the causes and effects of violence and conflicts are much more complicated. For instance, Gregory’s (2004) work on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan shows that the dynamics of imperialism, historical antecedents, and ideological and US political-economic interests played crucial roles in the so-called ‘war on terror’. Likewise, robust analyses in the fields of political ecology and peace studies show that outside interests and competition from capitalist countries generate violent political environments in countries that are resource-
rich but poor (e.g. Peluso & Watts, 2001; Lujala & Rustad, 2012). Sheila Gruner (2007) argues that American interests and attempts to control resources through neoliberal restructuring and privatization contribute to deadly violence and displacement in Colombia. In short, while the relationships between poverty and violence are real, why and how they relate to each other is much more complicated; they involve the historical, cultural, political and socio-economic contexts surrounding violence, which statistical analyses overlook.

Two: Blurring the Boundaries between Political Violence and Criminal Violence

The policy literature blurs the boundaries between political resistance movements and gang/criminal violence. Again, the World Bank report is a case in point. The report puts all sorts of violence and conflicts - gang activities, ‘terrorism', drug trafficking, social protests, indigenous struggles for justice and equal rights – in its generic category of “political and criminal violence” (2011: 6). One paragraph reads:

Media references to terrorism peaked after 9/11 and then gradually declined, but references to gangs and trafficking steadily increased over the last decade.... The Middle East and North Africa have experienced a series of dramatic social protests and political turbulence, escalating into outright conflict in some countries. Violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan is consuming the attention of global policy makers. As this report goes to print, a new nation is emerging in Southern Sudan, with the opportunities and risks involved in that endeavor. Drug based violence appears to be on the increase in Central America, threatening both local and national governance. Global terrorism remains a serious threat... (World Bank, 2011: 53; emphases added).

Three: State-Centrism

The policy literature takes the state for granted and is inclined to look at violence from the viewpoint of the state. This assumption results in presuming that non-state armed groups are ‘troublemakers’ by default, putting them indiscriminately in the blanket category of criminals. Thus, the role of state violence fades into the background.

“The organized violence that disrupts governance and compromises development also includes local violence involving militias or between ethnic groups, gang violence, local resource-related violence and violence linked to trafficking (particularly drug trafficking), and violence associated
with global ideological struggles....” (World Bank, 2011: 53; emphases added).

In effect, non-state armed groups appear, either implicitly or explicitly, as looters, shooters and criminals in the policy literature. While some analysts do not always see insurgents as criminals, there are those who see the insurgents as “indistinguishable from bandits and pirates” (Grossman, 1999: 269). This viewpoint explains why econometric studies that dominate reports on the conflict economy tend to pay less attention to, for example, ‘indigenous’ people’s aspiration for justice and political equality. For instance, Do and Iyer (2010) assert that ethnic and caste polarization and the level of political participation are not significant to violence. Fearon and Laitin (2003) argue that insurgency continues in poor countries because of weak governments that have fewer resources to address insurgency (i.e. not because of people’s political aspirations). For Helge Holtermann (2012), insurgency in poorer countries is due to insurgency groups’ political and military opportunities to mobilize movements. These movements form as a result of “chance” or the technical capability of insurgent groups, such as their infrastructural reach and means of control (threats, cohesion, reward, persuasion). In these studies, there is little attention to legitimate political aspirations, such as control of ancestral territory and resources, which people lost to colonial and postcolonial regimes. If there is any discussion, there is a tendency to discredit rebels’ grievances as exaggerated, and that they “may be substantially disconnected from the large social concerns of inequality, political rights, and ethnic or religious identity” (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004:589). My point here is to highlight the problematic assumptions of quantitative studies, and what factors this economic focus obscures from view.

Given such generalization, simplification and state-centrism, the policy literature recommends strengthening state capacity to control non-state actors for the sake of ending conflict. One of the pioneering papers on the micro-level analysis of poverty and conflict suggests:

In policy terms, it seems unavoidable that the endogenous processes [vulnerability to poverty and violence] will sustain and prolong armed conflicts unless the conditions for household and individual support of armed groups are eliminated, or at least significantly weakened, by external intervention.... Actions aimed at ending armed conflict call for efforts not only to reinforce state capacity and eliminate resources available to armed
groups, but also to address the effects of their human support basis, either as a source of conflict re-ignition or, in cases where the conflict served to establish more legitimate forms of state- and nation-building, to promote the legitimacy of new political, economic and social institutions (Justino, 2009: 328; emphases added).

Four: Violence As Undermining Development

The policy literature sees poverty as causing violence; it also sees violence as undermining poverty reduction efforts. Standard arguments indicate that violence is an economic burden that undermines investment opportunities and causes social disruption (World Bank, 2011). According to the Global Peace Index, the cost of violence between 2006 and 2009 was $28 trillion worldwide and the cost of combating violence was $9.46 trillion in 2012 alone (i.e. 11% of the world GDP). The World Bank claims, “a country that experienced major violence over the period from 1981 to 2005 has a poverty rate 21 percentage points higher than a country that saw no violence…. The average cost of civil war is equivalent to more than 20 years of GDP growth for medium size developing countries” (2011: 5-6). In addition to domestic impacts, conflicts have regional and global impacts, such that each additional transnational ‘terrorist’ incident reduced by 0.4 percent the economic growth per year for European countries. A key policy prescription to end violence and conflict caused by the ‘troublemakers’ then is to bring ‘development’. The question raised in my study is, what if development shares responsibility for violence?

Critics of development have already argued that violence is intrinsic to development. According to Kothari and Harcourt, “the inherent violence to marginalized people is written into development’s birth certificate with its interdependent link with the dominant patterns of economic growth, technology and modernity” (2004:5). Arturo Escobar similarly argues that violence is not only secondary, temporary and endemic, but also structural, long lasting and “constitutive of development” (2004:16). Development as a strategy of capitalist market expansion is a spatial-cultural project that requires “the continuous conquest of territories and peoples and their ecological and cultural transformation along the lines of an allegedly rational order” (Escobar, 2004: 16). It also involves spatial-military logics of “selective inclusion and hyper-exclusion” in which local wars or “cruel little wars” (Joxe, 2002, cited in Escobar, 2004) are surrogates for outside interests (Escobar, 2004: 20). Studies across different continents also illustrate sustained
violence in resource-rich regions where both domestic and foreign interests compete for resource access (Le Billon, 2007; Watts, 2004; Gruner, 2007; Lujala and Rustad, 2012).

Another dynamic of the development enterprise is that it largely bypasses issues related to political conflicts and violence, as developmental issues – also called poverty – are rendered technical (Li, 2007; Mitchell, 2002). This problem has been well documented. Writing about Lesotho, James Ferguson argues that “what the ‘development’ apparatus in Lesotho does … [is] depoliticizing everything it touches, everywhere whisking political realities out of sight, all the while performing, almost unnoticed, its own pre-eminently political, operation of expanding state power” (1994: xv). As Ferguson writes, “political and structural causes of poverty… are systematically erased and replaced with technical ones…” (Ferguson, 1994:66; see also Li, 2007).

Not only does development avoid political questions, but it also contributes to violence. Peter Uvin, investigating the development enterprise in Rwanda, argues that the Rwandan genocide represented the failure of development aid. He argues that “development aid is symbiotic to the processes of exclusion and structural violence” (1998:141), and that “the way development was defined, managed, and implemented was a crucial element in the creation and evolution of many of the processes that led to genocide” (1998:3). As he explains, “the process of development and the international aid given to promote it interacted with the forces of exclusion, inequality, pauperization, racism, and oppression that laid the groundwork for the 1994 genocide” (1998:3). In short, attempts for poverty reduction or development are not innocent affairs.

The global policy discourses on poverty and violence should perhaps be welcome in the sense that micro-level analyses may provide nuances to certain socio-political phenomena that macro-level studies often overlook. Yet, the methodological limits to some “controllable” variables (growth, unemployment, etc.) eliminate the complex web of history, cultural politics, and socio-economic processes at global, regional, national and below-national scales. As Donald Moore suggests, the study of a political landscape requires complex conceptual approaches (Moore, 2005). His work on Zimbabwe reminds us of a complex web of history, power, geography, gender, cultural politics and access rights where distant events - historically and geographically – entangle with the landscape
of the present to produce unstable, messy micro-politics and forms of rule manifested in the everyday life of the present.

Utilizing broader conceptual debates on sovereignty, dispossession, securitization and regionalization in the context of state violence as a theoretical road map to ask questions about violence and development, this dissertation seeks answers by taking routes alternative to emerging policy studies. That is, in an attempt to problematize the emerging micro-level study of poverty and conflict, this research turns the focus around and looks primarily at state agents, instead of “rebel” or “insurgent groups”, as the vectors of violence (i.e. Myanmar government soldiers, and administrative and police officers in Thailand). My contribution is to examine how developmental efforts interact with forces of violence.

Taking inspiration from Donald Moore (2005), this research sheds light on how the ‘entanglement’ of historically-contingent and politico-economically fraught processes within and across national borders, such as nation-state building, historical and contemporary inter-state relations, securitization of borders, capitalist penetration, a complex web of migration and displacement, and regional development schemes combine to constitute the arena of political violence.

Methodologically, this research utilizes a micro-level study of violence, but also looks at the political economy of development that works at both national, below national and above national scales. As a case study, this dissertation explores the violent experiences of displaced ethnic Shan in Myanmar and Thailand in the context of the Greater Mekong Sub-region development program (GMS).

1.3. Research Settings

1.3.1. Greater Mekong Sub-region and Capitalist Expansion

In 1992, six Mekong riparian countries (Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Yunnan Province of China) entered a ‘comprehensive’ economic cooperation program called the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) program, with the
support of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The cooperation covers 2.6 million square kilometers and about 326 million people (See Figure 1.1).

The stated aim of the GMS is for poverty alleviation through closer cooperation among the member countries. Fundamental thinking behind the GMS is free market capitalist-oriented (See ADB, 2012a,b). The GMS program is about the facilitation of capitalist economic integration in the region and between predominant members of the GMS with East Asian economies (Glassman, 2010; Than, 2007). Admittedly, the GMS is an ‘economic cooperation’ program; it is designed to “enhance economic linkages across their borders” to foster economic growth through accelerated market integration and freer movements of goods and resources (ADB, 2012a,b,c). The purpose is to enhance international market competitiveness through increased connectivity and resource sharing (ADB, 2010). The Bank clearly states its approach to the GMS:

Regional economic cooperation is an important part of development. Although the main focus for developing countries is normally on policy and regulatory reforms, institutional strengthening, infrastructure investment, and human resource development, they must also build the connections allowing them to trade effectively with international markets. These markets include those next door, with neighboring countries. Also, many development opportunities can only proceed if neighboring countries cooperate (ADB, 2000; emphases added).
Figure 1-1. The Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS)
Source: ADB
The GMS also tacitly acknowledges political concerns, such as that each member country has its own political context and constraints. For Myanmar, economic sanctions by western governments meant that it made sense for Myanmar to cooperate closely with the GMS. Economic transactions through the GMS was one way to sell the country’s natural resources, fund its army and expand its control of territories administered by the armies of ethnic minorities. For China, the GMS has been a strategically important initiative for its energy security and development efforts for Southwest China (Goh, 2013). In addition, China has been concerned with expanding its political influence in the Mekong region to counter western and Japanese influence. Moreover, the mutual agreement from the GMS and each country not to interfere in each member state’s internal political affairs amounts, in fact, to a crucial political arrangement; cooperation ‘economically’ is meant to deter political hostilities among states and to avoid interfering in each other’s domestic political affairs (see e.g. ADB, 2012).

From its secretariat at the ADB headquarters in Manila, the Philippines, the Bank mobilizes funds for projects, provides technical assistance and policy support, and facilitates program management. By the end of 2011, the “ADB had extended loans and grants totaling $5.1 billion for 56 investment projects in the subregion with a total project cost of US$15 billion”, in addition to US$289 million for technical assistance (ADB, 2015). Major financial contributions, however, come from regional member countries, western donor governments, and private lenders.

The GMS Program is designed and run by economists and technical specialists based at the ADB headquarters. External consultants - individuals or companies mostly from donor countries - conduct assessments, recommendations and project evaluations. The GMS Environmental Operation Center (EOC), established in 2006, is based in Bangkok, while the Mekong Institute, based in Thailand’s northeast town of Khon Kaen, is tasked with human resource training for government officials. The program is guided by a 10-year comprehensive plan called the GMS Strategic Framework, a “key means through which closer economic cooperation and prosperity [are to] be achieved” (ADB, 2012c: 6). Two Strategic Frameworks, one in 2002 and another in 2012, provide detailed descriptions of strategies, resources and outcomes.
The GMS Program has nine ‘high priority’ sub-regional sectors or ‘strategic thrusts’, namely agriculture, energy, environment, human resource development, investment, telecommunications, tourism, trade and transport (ADB, 2012a). Each sector is overseen by a working group made up of government representatives from each member country. For the first two decades, the prime focus was on physical connectivity – transport roads and facilities. Since 1992, about $11 billion has been injected into projects connecting different nodes across the region (ADB, 2015). In 1998, a new ‘Economic Corridor’ approach was introduced, extending an East-West Economic Corridor, a North-South Economic Corridor and a Southern Economic Corridor on top of existing and/or planned cross-country highways in each country (ADB, 2010b; see figure 1.1). The plan has since been expanded to a total of nine corridors.

For the Bank, the GMS program is a success story. The Bank’s evaluations of the GMS generally conclude that the overall performance of the GMS has been “successful” and it has delivered “concrete results” (ADB, 2007; 2012). The ADB recommends that the program should move forward to the next level by maintaining its “regional nature” (ADB, 2007). By “success”, the Bank means economic growth. The ADB claims credit for “very strong growth performance” and a “large increase” in per capita incomes in the region. According to the Bank, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was $63 in Myanmar and $1,894 in Thailand in 1992, which increased to $832 and $5,394 respectively in 2011. In other countries in the region, “per capita incomes have increased tenfold” (ADB, 2012: 1).

The rise in per capita income is conflated with poverty reduction. The Bank claims that “[strong] growth is imperative for the [countries] to alleviate poverty and improve the standard of living” (ADB, 2012b: viii) The Bank also indicates that economic growth will alleviate the poverty of more than 250 million people in the region, mostly ethnic minority and rural people (ADB, 2010a). Its projects are to promote “sustainable economic growth that offers equal opportunities to all”; among its beneficiaries are “the most vulnerable and isolated communities” (ADB, 2013: np). The Bank states that the poverty level in the region was either above or close to 50% in 1992, but was reduced to much lower levels by 2011 (from 45% to 23% in Cambodia, 64% to 13% in China as a whole, 56% to 34% in Laos, 9% to 1% in Thailand and 64% to 17% in Vietnam (Bank, 2012: 1).
In order to sustain this growth, the Bank is "to link the GMS countries through improvements in infrastructure, thus overcoming domestic constraints and promoting trade and investment to boost economic growth further" (ADB, 2007: 5). In other words, the Bank tasks itself with facilitating cross-border movements of goods and people.

Such movement in the borderlands of the GMS, however, is not a new phenomenon. Instances of long-distance cross-border trade have been documented for the 19th century (Walker, 1999), or even earlier (Chen, 1966; Diana, 2013). The difference between earlier cross-border activities and the GMS is the institutionalization of cross-border cooperation by the national governments.

The GMS was the brainchild of former ADB President Noritada Morita (Glassman, 2010). The idea originated from a hydropower project in Laos, conceived in the 1980s, which was viable only because it found an energy market in Thailand. This motivated Noritada Morita to pursue subregional cooperation. The project convinced him that it was possible to bring warring countries together for economic purposes and that the Bank, in the words of Morita, could “strengthen peace and stability in the region with its neutral role” (ADB, 2012a:4).

His motivation coincided in the 1980s with Thailand’s need to expand into neighbouring countries for potential markets, cheap labour and resources in order to promote economic growth. In this context, former Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan’s vision to transform Indo-China from “a battlefield into a market-place” received popular attention (Glassman, 2010; see also Hirsch, 2001). Chatichai’s catch phrase resonated with a combination of perceived environmental depletion, eco-political obstacles to resource development, and an indigenous environmental movement in Thailand, encouraging Thai investors to “search for alternative or supplementary sources of materials and energy in neighbouring countries” (Hirsch, 1995:257). As an example, Thai logging industries had rapidly expanded in the late 1980s and early 1990s into Burma, Laos and Cambodia, where resources could be extracted from countries with weak state

5 There is a vague acknowledgment that the borders were closed for ‘international’ traffic, as noted by ADB President Haruhiko Kuroda (ADB 2012c; 2012d). But the ADB still portrays as it the GMS program is what makes border trade and mobility possible.
regulatory and public oversight (Hirsch, 1995). In regard to the dams that were planned in Myanmar by Thailand (and China), EGAT (the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand) testified in 2003 to the Senate Commission that the proposed dams would flood only a “very small” area of land in Thailand. The testimony ignored that 85% of the area to be flooded was in Burma (Luntharimar, 2003). Despite evidence of large-scale potential ecological destruction and dispossession in Myanmar, EGAT has insisted on Thailand’s economic gains from the dams in Myanmar through the GMS program.

The proposed GMS resonated with Thailand’s need for cheap labour as well. Thailand had achieved rapid economic growth in the 1980s, much it based on export expansion and cheap domestic labour (Glassman, 1999). This productive condition, however, changed in the 1990s when domestic workers became increasingly militant, and competition from countries with low cost labour (including China) intensified, challenging Thailand’s existing comparative advantage (Glassman, 1999). Moreover, “since the year 2000, [Thailand’s] dependence on US and European markets has declined and … ASEAN and other regional and sub-regional markets has increased, attesting to the promise of sub-regional cooperation like the GMS” (Medhi, 2004:996). This change explains Thailand’s agreement to the inclusion of Myanmar and Laos in the GMS as sources of cheap labour.

Given these strategic resource needs, the ADB had to facilitate, via GMS member states, capitalist social conditions in which available resources could be shared in the region to fuel rapid economic growth. The point is that the GMS is about facilitating economic growth in a free market context, in which relatively more advanced countries exploit labour and resources from less advanced countries – all within the regional framework.

The foundations for these possibilities were primarily physical and infrastructure connectivity. For the first twenty years, the Bank’s emphasis and project financing were for large-scale infrastructure projects to connect member countries. The legitimating discourse for the promotion of infrastructure projects has come to be the ‘3Cs’ –

6 The commissions are the Senate Commission of Foreign Affairs and the Senate Commission on People’s Participation.
connectivity, competitiveness, and most importantly, community. These are interlocking elements geared towards promoting economic growth in the sense that a regional community and physical connectivity are required for sharing resources and benefits in the region, and ultimately for ‘global’ competitiveness (see e.g. ADB, 2007).

China also welcomed the GMS from the beginning as it coincided with the government in Beijing needing to develop its landlocked western area, where levels of income increasingly lagged behind those of the more-developed eastern region. Since the mid 1980s, China had embarked on expanding economic relations with Southeast Asia. With the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the GMS, China began to foster economic relations with Mekong states for both economic and security reasons. In terms of trade, China had a trade surplus with four countries of the GMS countries (except Thailand) in 2008. As a donor country, it has developed a sustained influence over smaller countries in the region, while securing resources and markets via trade and aid (Hensengerth, 2011).

1.3.2. Myanmar in the GMS

Myanmar joined the Asian Development Bank in 1973, but the last time the Bank lent money was in 1986 and the last approved Myanmar-specific Technical Assistance was in 1987. The Bank stopped lending money to the government of Myanmar due to the government’s failure to make loan and interest payments in the late 1980s. Western governments, including the US, which dominate the Bank, also pursued economic sanctions against Myanmar, condemning the junta’s violence and human rights abuses, and disallowing the Bank from lending money to Burma/Myanmar.

Myanmar, however, has still participated in regional cooperation programs sponsored by the Bank. These programs have included the Greater Mekong Sub-region cooperation program (GMS), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sector Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and the Ayeyawady – Chao Phraya – Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS). And while Myanmar did not receive country specific loans and technical assistance (TA) from the Bank, it received TA indirectly by participating in these regional cooperation projects, for projects in which two or more
countries were involved. By 2011, Myanmar had received $38.1 million in funding from financial partners for six investment projects and $5.8 million for 14 TA projects. The ADB, together with the World Bank and the IMF, continue to monitor economic conditions in Myanmar (ADB Fact Sheet: n.d.).

Up to 2012, the Bank claimed that it did not support or operate in Myanmar, but it maintained limited relations with the country. Myanmar, however, has continued to be a member of the GMS program, except for not receiving direct loans and support. Various projects in Myanmar across all nine sectors have been included in GMS overall planning, provided that Myanmar funds itself or finds other donors to fund the projects. In 2010, a total of 16 projects were included on the Vientiane Plan of Action for GMS development for 2008-2012 (ADB, 2010). Indeed, Myanmar constitutes a crucial member of the GMS program given its strategic location and rich endowment of natural resources. Almost all ADB documents on Myanmar make reference to the country’s rich natural resources. Myanmar is part of both the North-South, and East-West economic corridors. In addition, it is part of the regional power and energy grids; a hydropower project in the Shan State named Tasang or Mong Ton is even identified by the Bank as a ‘high priority’ project (Caubet, 2010; Caubet and Lefebvre, 2010).

Since 2012, the Asian Development Bank has conducted a series of assessments on Myanmar. A single thread running through all the assessments indicates that Myanmar is ready to benefit from opening up to the world, and that it will become “one of the next rising stars in Asia” (ADB, 2012b:vii). Although issues related to governance, corruption, and internal conflicts are mentioned, a tone of optimism overrides all potential challenges. The Bank’s attention to challenges faced by Myanmar are not on political issues such as military conflicts, land grabbing, displacement, racism and humiliation of ethnic minority and marginalized people, but rather on economic aspects such as weak macroeconomic management and insufficient fiscal resources. The Bank thus pushes for macroeconomic and fiscal reforms - i.e. liberalization. Regardless of these challenges, the Bank indicates that Myanmar has “good potential for growth” by referring to Myanmar’s endowments in natural resources, abundant youthful population for labour, and its strategic location between South Asia, Southeast Asia and China (ADB, 2012b:vii).
In the face of such optimism, the violence experienced by dispossessed people is an unhealed wound. In the past sixty years, various forms of violence have taken place across Burma, mostly committed by the Burmese army and to some extent by ethnic armies. Especially since 1988, state violence and oppression were felt more severely in border regions where ethnic minority people live. Instances of forced labour, extra-judicial killings, rape, torture and various other types of violence have taken place on an everyday basis in all ethnic minority territories, driving people out of their homes to take refuge in neighbouring countries. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are 587,000 what they call Internally Displaced People, 810,000 stateless people in Myanmar, and more than 400,000 refugees in Malaysia, Bangladesh and Thailand in early 2015 (UNHCR, 2015). Many thousands have resettled to North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand since the early 1990s. Among refugee populations in Thailand, the experiences of ethnic Shan are unique, which is why they are the focus of this study.

1.3.3. The Ethnic Shan: Refugee, Migrant, Displaced

Shan historian Sai Aung Tun documents the migration of Shan people from Central Asia to today’s Burma beginning in the first century AD (Tun, 2009). Anthropological accounts (e.g. Eberhardt, 2006) show the long-existing mobility of the Shan between the Shan State and northern Thailand for multiple purposes: for seasonal work or religious reasons, for both temporary and permanent migration, and to maintain family ties across the border. Migration since the 1990s, however, appears to be distinct from the recent past. Contemporary migration is largely as permanent refugees. Most importantly, the Shan enter the realm of ‘illegal’ immigration tightly controlled by the Thai state, whereas in earlier periods, migrants were largely unnoticed by the regulatory regime.

Since the late 1990s, ethnic Shan people from the Shan State in eastern Myanmar have been moving to Thailand in greater numbers. Most have fled to Thailand due to the Myanmar Army’s military offensive against the Shan State Army (South) starting in 1996. Accusing Shan villagers of being rebels, rebel sympathizers or supporters, the Myanmar army launched massive forced relocation programs in 1996 and 1998. According to the Shan Human Rights Foundation, up to 1,400 villages in central Shan State were
completely depopulated in the late 1990s (SHRF, 1998). An estimate of 300,000 people were involuntarily relocated to army guarded Su Si Ywar (combined hamlets) or San Pya villages (model villages) in which everyday survival was difficult, and lives were at risk due to abuse, largely from Burmese soldiers. These relocation programs went alongside army operations called Nae Myae Soe Moe Yae (literally ‘territorial control’) or Nae Myae Lon Chon Yae (territorial security) in which entire villages were burnt down, and people were either killed or forced to serve as military porters or minesweepers. Sexual violence was an endemic occurrence (SWAN, 2002). As a result, groups of people (both from relocation sites and villages) fled to Thailand. During the time of my field research, there were at least 500,000 people from Myanmar in northern Thailand, mostly ethnic Shan, but there were also a large number from other minority groups including PaO, Palaung, Lisu, Akha, Karenni, Kachin, Burman, ethnic Gorkha/Burmese-Nepalese and Burmese Muslims (Pers. Coms., officers from Thailand’s Ministry of Labour and the Shan State Army, 2010-2011).

Another important aspect of Shan migration has been reported by environmental activist groups, who claim that Shan people have been militarized and displaced from the areas where natural resources are being extracted (logging, gold mining, etc.). A particularly important example is a large-scale hydropower project planned in the Shan State known as the Tasang dam. The Shan Sapawa Environmental Organization claims that 60,000 people from the dam area have been dispossessed (Sapawa, 2006; Salween Watch, 1999). People have been involuntarily relocated, but have also been forced to work as security guards and hard labourers for road and bridge construction. Claims by Thailand-based environmental organizations that people have been displaced ‘due to’ the dam project seem to be limited because evidence of the dam project is less visible than the army’s counterinsurgency operation. The Burmese army’s violent relocation of many thousands of people during 1996 and 2000 in areas including the Tasang site were the sites where the Shan State Army (South) was operating. The primary reason for relocation was to put civilians under military control so that the Shan army could not access resources from the civilians. In other words, it was in the context of counterinsurgency operations against the Shan State Army that people were dispossessed. As discussed in Chapter 4, however, military conflict was not completely disconnected from the Tasang
project. Yet, the immediate reason for relocating people during 1996 and 2000 appeared to be part of the counterinsurgency operation, rather than the Tasang project *per se*.

The Tasang dam is one of several hydroelectric dams to be built on the Salween River in eastern Burma (See Figure 1.2). It is to be financed and constructed by private companies and state-linked institutions from China, Thailand and Burma. The dam is located about 130 km away from the Thailand-Burma border. With a total of US$7 billion investment (previously $6 billion), the 228 meter high Tasang dam will have a generating capacity of 7,700 MW to produce 35,446 GHW per year (MoEP II, 2011). Thailand will import 85% of the electricity from the dam.
Figure 1-2. Planned Hydropower Dams on the Salween
Source: International River
Regionally, the Tasang is part of the Mekong Power Grid, which is a region-wide transmission grid aimed at connecting power-producing countries such as Burma with importing countries such as Thailand and Vietnam (Ryder, 2003). The GMS program identifies the Tasang as a ‘high priority’ and ‘highly profitable’ project (Caubet, 2010; Caubet and Lefebvre, 2010). During the time of fieldwork in late 2011, the major stakeholder changed from Thailand to China. A new memorandum was signed to proceed with the project. The Shan Sapawa Environmental Organization claims that rapid militarization, forced relocation and various abuses have intensified since Thailand and Burma signed the Memorandum of Understanding on the Tasang dam in 2002 (Sapawa, 2006).

As a result of experiencing sustained violence and dispossession, large numbers of ethnic Shan have fled to Thailand. Although their flight resulted from political violence in the Shan State, they are not registered in Thailand as refugees but are referred to instead as ‘illegal economic immigrants’. To counter this label, I refer to the Shan in Thailand as Refugee-Migrant-Displaced (RMD), underlining the fact that these are refugees from political violence. There is no public, official reason for the denial of refugee status in Thailand except that the Shan were not “displaced persons fleeing from fighting” (i.e. wars between two parties) (Pongthep, 2003).7 The effects of civil war and persecution based on ethnicity and politics are not considered (Pongthep, 2003). Shan communities assume that the Thai government is afraid of more refugee inflows had they been recognized as refugees or provided more or less permanent refugee camps, or that they might easily assimilate into the Thai population given the Shan cultural and linguistic affinity to the northern Thai. Long-standing Shan communities in Chiang Mai quote local politicians saying that migrant status is better than refugee status for the Shan because they can still work and earn money instead of being locked up in camps. My evidence, however, discloses that as a result of not being recognized as refugees, the Shan, as ‘illegal’ immigrants, have had to seek low-paid and dangerous jobs in Thailand such as construction, farming, domestic work, manufacturing, restaurant work and sex work. They

7 As Chapter 5 and 8 demonstrate, some officers believe that the Shan are displaced because of the conflict (not development projects). Officially, however, they are not treated as those displaced by conflict – i.e. refugees.
have also become subject to new forms of violence, as I will document in ensuing chapters.

As of 2007, estimates of 300,000 to 500,000 Shan migrants were part of about four million migrants from Myanmar in Thailand (ILO, 2007; HRW, 2012). A conservative estimate by the International Labour Organization indicated that 1.8 million migrants in Thailand, constituting about 5% of Thailand’s workforce, contributed $53 million annually to the Thai economy8 (ILO, 2007). To exemplify the importance of this labour source, almost all the factories in Tak province, a major manufacturing province bordering Burma, had to close down in 1999 due to a massive police round up of migrant workers (Yongyuth, 2000).

Although the Shan (and Burmese migrant workers in general) are crucial to the Thai economy, they are treated badly. But the economic exploitation of these workers is what makes them useful to the Thai economy. In Chiang Mai province, the average daily wage for migrant workers in 2010 and 2011 was around 100 baht a day (or US$3). In some places, the wage was as low as 30 baht (US$1), whereas the official minimum wage was 180 baht (US$ 6) (raised to 251 baht or US$ 8 in 2012). In addition, migrants have routinely been denied compensation for workplace accidents, face arbitrary wage deductions and can be fired without pay. There are instances of employers calling in the police to arrest their migrant employees to avoid paying wages. Migrants also face arbitrary – and at times violent -- arrest and extortion by the police. In addition, the threats to migrants' livelihood have included a migrant registration program since the early 1990s that has not only been costly for the migrants, but has also denied them rights and protections (see Chapter 9). In 2011, the complicated registration process cost each migrant up to 15,000-20,000 baht ($500 to $700), which is equal to about five months’ salary for construction and domestic workers. Yet, they are barred from changing employers, moving their residence, or finding a new workplace. Changing any of these locations requires going through official procedures, which also costs money. Unless they go through the procedures, they are rendered 'illegal' and are subjected to extortion,

8 This accounts for 1.8 million workers only, whereas there are about 4 million migrants.
arrest, and deportation, often involving physical violence. These violent and insecure conditions are covered in more detail in Chapter 9.

But the nature of the violence is not always straightforward, whether in Myanmar or in Thailand. Violent experiences cannot be reduced to an incident of outright physical harm at one geographic location. Instead these instances are more complex and multi-sited as there are multiple forces and contradictions at work. These forces include: the Burmese army’s territorial control and counter-insurgency activities in the name of protecting state sovereignty; the proposed Tasang dam project that is important for the ADB and its developers; the army that has driven out people from the dam area for a dam, not yet in existence, that has been on the agenda since the 1980s; Shan people continuing to leave for Thailand due to deteriorating livelihood conditions at home despite the Burmese government’s mushrooming development projects; the lure of economic opportunity in Thailand that attracts many thousands of Shan migrants; and the subsequent ill treatment of Shan migrants through incidents of ongoing violence and everyday insecurity.

To be fair, the sustained violence in Myanmar does not mean that the Asian Development Bank completely ignores political conflicts in Myanmar. Although Myanmar is a member of the GMS program, the Bank has restricted engagement and support to the Burmese government. Likewise, violence against the Shan in Thailand does not necessarily mean that migrants are entirely left unprotected. There are migrant legalization programs, health care programs and some improvement in the treatment of migrant workers in the past few years. The GMS program also has a human resource development sector that seeks to protect migrant workers, although it is limited in scope and effectiveness. The question then is how to understand these forces and contradictions in regard to inescapable cycles of violence experienced by the Shan, which is the key analytical concern of this dissertation.
1.4. Research Questions

The driving question of this research is: why is violence a persistent experience for poor and vulnerable people regardless of conflict-reducing and poverty alleviation development efforts aiming to help them?

This question will be addressed by responding to the following specific questions:

(1) How do the competing claims for sovereignty and capitalist regionalization in the GMS unfold in ways that, contrary to the rhetoric of economic growth and peace, produce sustained poverty and violence for vulnerable populations?

(2) How does the state, in the context of regionalization and national development, enable violence and poverty to be perpetuated? In particular,
   a. In Myanmar, through what entanglements of capitalist regionalization of resource claims, post-colonial struggles over national territory, and militarized state building has violence against vulnerable peoples been perpetuated?
   b. In Thailand, how does state territorialization, in the name of state sovereignty and national security, contribute to a climate of violence for migrant workers in Thailand?

(3) How does the ADB position in GMS regionalization, and its action and non-action with respect to sovereignty, allow for violence and dispossession against marginalized populations?

1.5. Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are:

- To discover the complex web of forces including militarized nation-state building and ethnic conflict in Myanmar, securitization of migration in Thailand, and capitalist resource grabbing in the GMS that combine to constitute violence and dispossession for the Shan;

- To trace the everyday experiences of Shan people from military violence in Myanmar, through their flight to Thailand, to the vagaries of labour regulation, exploitation and financial extortion in Thailand;
- To understand the everyday experiences of Burmese soldiers who enact violence on the Shan;

- To understand the ways in which a GMS regionalization program aiming to help vulnerable people results instead in supporting violence and dispossession for these people in Myanmar and Thailand;

- To analyze the ADB’s official plans for GMS regionalization in the context of energy and labour migration to understand how these plans relate to violence and dispossession in Thailand and Myanmar.

1.6. Arguments and Dissertation Outline

Contrary to global policy discourse, poverty does not translate readily into violent conflict. Neither can the phenomenon of violence experienced by vulnerable people be understood by looking at one instance of violence at one geographic space at a time – for example a dam project or regulation of ‘illegal’ migration. The ways violence unfolds is complicated in that understanding violence cannot be understood by identifying causes, but rather by focusing on the ‘processes’ in which different events, relations, interests and actors entangle with each other at different times, sites and scales. I do not intend to paint any clear picture about violence, but rather to show the messiness of events and processes that reproduce the cycle of violence. Precisely because of this messiness, it seems, development efforts intended to reduce conflicts are often ineffective or even counterproductive.

The cycle of violence experienced by poor and marginalized Shan minority people relates to the entanglement of the practices of ‘statecraft’ (Soguk, 1994) with capitalist practices of profit accumulation, which work through multiple scales (bodily, national and regional). One of the practices of statecraft is the state’s efforts to consolidate national territorial control through discourses and practices of state sovereignty and territorial security. In this entanglement, there is an “ideological separation” of politics from economics (Sharma, 2015), allowing the state to simultaneously acquire territory (vis-à-vis ethnic minorities or “indigenous settlers” (Sharma, 2015)) and plunder resources by dispossessing people from their land, property and livelihoods without being subjected to any outside oversight. In other words, the state’s claiming the territories of ethnic minorities in the name of state sovereignty is considered politics. Meanwhile, the state’s selling the
lands and resources on them for profit is considered economics. Politics (taking land and resources, often violently and aggressively) is ideologically placed in the ‘national’ domain to make it a ‘sovereign affair’ that no outsider can interfere with. Economics (selling those lands and resources), however, is ideologically placed in the ‘regional’ domain, in which various actors can share benefits and progress. In these transactions, the political process of making available the to-be-traded lands and resources is thereby rendered invisible.

Empirically, the Burman elites attempt to control territories they consider to be ‘national’ vis-à-vis minority peoples, legitimated by specific political imaginations of ancient empires. In the process, minority peoples such as the Shan have lost the ancestral land that they claim. They continue to be dispossessed of their lands and their resource-rich region has been ceded to the Burmese military junta, which then trades these resources with neighbouring countries such as Thailand and China, both bilaterally and through the GMS program. Thailand also turns the dispossessed Shan into cheap and disposable migrant labour through needlessly elaborate bureaucratic means such as migrant registration. Corrupt para-state officials’ extortion also traps Shan migrants in the vicious cycle of poverty, legal precariousness and vulnerability.

The aggressive and violent processes that make available land, resources and disposable labour, whether in Myanmar or in Thailand, are conceptually contained in the realm of ‘domestic politics’ that their neighbours in the GMS are not to be involved in; they are restricted to the realm of ‘regional’ economic exchanges: i.e. regional market exchanges of lands, resources and labour. Neighbours in the GMS exchange these resources (labour and materials), but they bypass the very process that made available these to-be-exchanged resources. Violence continues as the Burmese state acquires territories and resources; Thailand sustains Shan migrant labourers; and the GMS continues to provide the conceptual ‘regional’ ‘economic’ platform for exchanging resources made possible ‘nationally’ and ‘politically’. In other words, the violent process of making the resources available is considered ‘politics’ and ignored; but the exchange of those resources is promoted and celebrated as ‘economics’ good for the region.

To elaborate on these arguments, the following summaries outline the chapters to follow.
Chapter 2 provides the conceptual underpinnings of this study.

Chapter 3 covers the suite of methods used in gathering the information analyzed here.

Chapter 4 then explores the history and current dynamics of the Myanmar government’s claim over “national” territories through military means versus the ethnic armies’ struggle for self-determination over ancestral land. The chapter argues that the conflict in Myanmar is a historically contingent, politically-inspired, and identity-based armed conflict, not a poverty-induced conflict. On the one hand, the central state, referring to ancient Burmese empires, claims ethnic minorities’ ancestral lands as part of the Burmese ‘national’ sovereign territory. On the other hand, ethnic groups claim their ancestral lands by means of armed struggle through discourses of federalism and self-determination. In this political conflict over territories, the commercial interests of Burmese ruling blocs, ethnic armies and various entities from the GMS region are also implicated.

Chapter 5 problematizes the competing claims of human rights groups and policy makers. The human rights groups appear to argue for the close relation between displacement and the Tasang dam project, while policy makers reduce displacement to the conflict between the government and armies of ethnic “rebels”. The chapter shows that in the same way that violence unfolds through the struggles over territories and resources, displacement is also the result of an entanglement in which peoples’ labour, resources and mobility come to be controlled, thus creating “conditions for displacement”. That is, it is not simply that either the dam project or armed conflict displaces people, but that the protracted conflict that involves physical violence and control of people’s labour, resources and mobility creates conditions that make people move. The chapter also shows that people whose livelihoods are violently threatened generally migrate to Thailand instead of joining ethnic armed groups, an outcome that contrasts with the versions of policy studies that claim that poor or unemployed people prolong violent conflicts by joining insurgent groups.

Chapter 6, examining the experiences of impoverished Myanmar government soldiers who enact violence on poor villagers, argues that while the Myanmar army’s reason for counterinsurgency is to ‘reclaim’ national sovereign territory, the soldiers’
purpose in enacting violence is not always for ‘national’ purposes, but usually for their own survival. That is, the impoverished soldiers need to extort and loot resources from the villagers to meet their daily needs. Even then, it is not just poverty per se that forces them to act violently. Dynamics of inequality, oppression, and class and gender-based exploitation within the Myanmar army affect soldiers (and their families) to the extent that they in turn further exploit civilians, particularly through extortion and looting, for their own survival. In this chain of processes, further coercive and violent exploitation is involved in the transfer of wealth from poor soldiers to senior military officers.

These three chapters from Part II, showing the complex and messy politics at the scales of the nation, the village and the body, unsettle the global policy discourses, demonstrating that it is impossible to understand violence by treating poverty as the key analytic variable in explaining violence. These chapters demonstrate that the process of violence involves selective histories (or historical discourses), identity politics, resource control and extraction, and class and gender-based exploitation.

If poverty does not explain violence, what do poverty reduction efforts do to the business of addressing violence? Three chapters in Part III address this question by exploring the Greater Mekong Sub-region development program in the context of resource sharing and the governance of migration. The purpose of this analysis is not to investigate whether or not development can, or to what extent it does, reduce or prevent conflict, but rather to investigate the ‘location’ of development in violent conflicts by looking at the way development interacts with other forces involved.

Chapter 7 argues that the approach of the GMS, sponsored by the ADB, endorses an approach to development, conflicts and politics that resembles the way that the nation-state of Myanmar thinks about and implements development for the purpose of claiming sovereign territory. The chapter compares the Burmese government’s depoliticization of violent conflict (i.e. framing conflict as a development problem) with the ADB’s framing of the GMS as an apolitical, natural economic cooperation for regional development. The chapter provides an overview of the GMS and illuminates not only that the discursive construction of the GMS resembles the national discourse of the Myanmar state, but also that this view privileges the nation state. In effect, just as nation-state building serves to
transfer land, resources and decision-making power from ethnic minorities to rulers at the center, the GMS similarly transfers resources and decision-making power from local resource users to the transnational bloc consisting of state officials, technocrats, bureaucrats, donors and experts.

Chapter 8 looks at the way violence at the Tasang hydropower project site in Myanmar is related to the GMS. It argues that the ADB is implicated in the forces of violence in Myanmar by providing a new discursive space for state claims and the exchange of resources. The ADB depoliticizes the violent political-economic and military relations upon which the militarized Myanmar state has been able accumulate financial capital, and to stay in power vis-à-vis indigenous populations, over whose land and resources the state was determined to claim sovereign authority. The chapter also reveals that the Bank has been involved in the Tasang project in terms of technical assistance, but not financial aid, thus effectively releasing itself from social responsibility. The Bank's safeguard policies for social responsibility are only applicable to ADB-financed and/or administered projects. As such, the Bank’s role in the region is the provider of discursive legitimacy and conceptual possibility for resource exchanges between and among states and development partners. Creating ‘possibilities’ is crucial in that the states are able to claim and trade resources by taking advantage of the ideas of GMS cooperation and community, even for matters that are bilaterally negotiated and executed (i.e. not part of the formal GMS planning matrix).

Chapter 9 investigates the way the GMS has related to the governance of displaced Shan people in Thailand. The chapter finds that the GMS privileges the autonomy of the nation-state. Regardless of the discourses of GMS community or ‘GMS citizens’, the Bank’s relegation of migrant regulation to the national level not only reinforces the differences between migrants and citizens, but also reinforces the nationalist regulation of migration in the name of protecting and securing citizens vis-à-vis outsiders. Such nationalist regulation entails various forms of violence including extortion of migrants by the government (through migrant legalization programs), and by state and para-state officials. This chapter frames this extortion as a form of dispossession as it depletes the migrants’ wage income that is the main source of their everyday survival.
Chapter 10 discusses key findings from the research in a theoretical context. It questions the global policy discourses on violence and development by highlighting the research findings about the nature of the interaction between the forces of development and violence.

1.7. Significance of this research

**Violence:** Studies of the ADB and the GMS have usually focused on the political-economic perspective, water and resource management, socio-economic development, environmental governance, security, and institutional critiques of the ADB (e.g. Oehlers 2006; Krongkaew, 2004; Chayan and Amporn, 2011; Goh, 2013; Summers, 2008; Dosch, 2007). There has rarely been a study of the GMS program in terms of conflict and violence, with a few exceptions (e.g. Glassman, 2010; Hughes, 2011). This research contributes to the existing body of literature on the GMS program by exploring it through the perspective of political violence. It shows that the GMS is a violent political project, even as it portrays itself as a model of ‘peace-time’ economic cooperation.

**State violence:** In addition to the violence generated by the “national” politico-military struggle between the Myanmar government and ethnic armed organizations, this research also looks at state violence at a micro- or bodily level. It approaches the issue of violence in terms of the socio-economic livelihood of Burmese soldiers to understand the limits of the traditional analyses on state violence. In particular, this study looks at the experiences of Burmese soldiers to show how their poverty, starvation and experiences of oppression within the army explain their violent actions against civilians.

**Form of Governance:** My study also highlights how extra-legal monetary exchanges between state agents (Myanmar soldiers, Thai police, Ministry of Labour and local government officials) and the Shan migrants in the form of extortion constitute a crucial element of governmental relations, in which violence and exploitation are not necessarily for the state’s interest in bolstering state power, nor are they necessarily related to capitalist accumulation. The violence and extortion are instead related to survival and the self-interest of state officials at various levels, enabled by migrant workers’ insecure position in relation to the state.
**Migration/Displacement**: The issue of migration and displacement in the context of the GMS as a violent political project has been little studied. My study contributes to the body of literature on migration and GMS regionalization by looking at the ADB/GMS’s handling of the migration issue in the name of human resource development. In particular, this analysis looks both at the ADB’s refusal to handle at the regional level the socio-economic welfare of cross-border migrants, and at the simultaneous ADB relegation of migrant regulation to the national states. This dual move winds up enabling insecurity and dispossession for migrants.
Chapter 2. Conceptual Keywords

2.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the conceptual keywords that inform this dissertation. Instead of extensively reviewing the literatures debating those keywords, the purpose of this chapter is rather to illustrate how I conceptualize those keywords in approaching violence as the key theme of this work. The keywords are sovereignty, dispossession, securitization, and regionalization. “Violence” - of capitalism, economic development and the state - is the glue that holds these keywords together. The dynamics of depoliticization run through these keywords.

2.2. Sovereignty

National sovereignty has been one of the most frequently uttered political themes in the second half of the twentieth century. Those who fought, and still fight, for sovereignty narrate and struggle for it in the name of freedom, equality and democracy. Outcomes of the political project of sovereignty, however, have wrought violence and exclusion. Nandita Sharma argues that “within any sovereignty project, whether of the dominant or the dominated, lies a deeply exclusionary politics, a politics that attempts to depoliticize itself in the name of essentialist claims to ‘natural’ rights” (Sharma, 2015:35). As Sharma argues:

This is evident in the many so-called successful efforts to oust colonizers the world over. For many of the people fighting for decolonization, achieving a nationalized sovereignty has simply meant finding themselves inserted into a new nation-state system of ruling. Those able to command the power of nation-states use it against those who do not. Indeed, we can see in many of the postcolonies an intensification of the always-violent politics of exclusion…. In the new ruling system of postcoloniality, the relationships and experiences of colonialism endure, albeit under a new guise.

This is a useful insight for this dissertation in exploring violence in Burma/Myanmar where ethnic Burmans, who led the fight against the British, and later against the
Japanese, for independence enacted an "always-violent politics of exclusion" (Sharma, 2015:36). Since independence in 1948, the state dominated by anti-colonial warriors has engaged in military missions to assert national sovereignty over territories they imagine to be their forefathers' land (see Chapter 4). In response, people who became 'minority national races' (tain-yin-thar in Burmese, literally 'original peoples') in postcolonial Burma have resorted to armed struggle to re-claim their self-determination over their pre-British colonial sovereign lands. Seen in this light, the struggle for sovereignty as a political project is the struggle over land, which has been transformed into contested nationalized territory.

The struggle over sovereignty “cannot be uncoupled – historically or now – from the social relations of capitalism wherein the control of the means of production (including land and the people on it) is held by those who can claim to “represent” the “sovereign nation”” (Sharma, 2015:35). Studies in political ecology since the 1990s agree with this claim. The question of land in terms of “enclosure”, “dispossession”, and “privatization” has been central to conflicts, as land control continues to be important for profit accumulation in the twenty-first century, even with the emergence of new forms that show that the struggle, actors and conflicts are always historically, contextually, spatially and temporally specific (Peluso & Lund, 2011). Peluso and Lund (2011) identify enclosure, territorialization and legalization as key processes in establishing land control – that is, “practices that fix or consolidate forms of access, claiming, and exclusion for some time” (Peluso & Lund, 2011:668). Among these practices, this dissertation is concerned more with enclosure and territorialization.

Enclosure is a process of moving people off the land so that capitalists can use it for more ‘economically’ productive purposes. Territorialization is a spatial strategy that involves “claiming” territories (Peluso & Lund, 2011), “controlling” people, “regulating” their activities and resources, by mapping, boundary marking and allocating resources to users (states, non-state, private) (Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995). In other words, it is about “claiming” territories through various strategies and allocating them to state and non-state (private/corporate) users by altering previous land ownership and use relations.

Who will be given access to land and resources is a matter of creating new political subjectivities and property (Peluso & Lund, 2011). This is where the nationalist imagination
constructs some as the “nationalized membership” (Sharma, 2015) -- as opposed to “foreigners” and “others”. Since there cannot exist “us” without an opposing referent “them”, “a major consequence of the entrenchment of a nationalist imagination of state sovereignty has been the drawing and strengthening of not only physical, territorial borders between national states but also borders between people said to belong to the nation and those constituted its foreign others” (Sharma, 2015:50). The category of “other” may be constituted by different classifications of peoples, such as ethnic minorities, foreigners, and immigrants, who are integrated into the nationalist imagination of the nation, but differently. The classification is not always for outright or standard denial of rights and resources, but to allocate differential treatments.

Creation of new political subjectivities in the process of territorialization involves what Liisa Malkki calls, “The rooting of people and territorialization of national identity” (Malkki, 1992:24). The nationalist imagination forces people to think everyone should belong to a proper nation, be rooted to a proper place, and cultured as a proper people. Such is a mapping of people, culture and place. This constellation is naturalized in the nationalist ideology of state sovereignty that certain land is exclusive to a specific national group to be defended and/or re-claimed -- through violence if necessary. As such, as much as control over land is about the material appropriation of land, the struggle over land is also a political struggle over identities - ethnic, religious, gender and so on (Peet & Watts, 2004; Peluso & Lund, 2011).

But if the state (or sovereignty-seeking actor) is to claim and control land, what gives it the legitimacy to claim that land in the first place? According to Baird and Le Billion (2012), “political memories” inform people’s social construction of nationalism. Similar to Moore’s notion (2005) that history continues to be part of the present-day struggle, Baird and Le Billion assert that “[p]resent-day politics continue to rely on the symbolism of wartime events to justify present-day power structures” (2012: 298) and that political memories shape not only how people understand political landscapes but also how they think about who should be included and excluded (Baird, 2014). This insight is important in that, as my research finds, the Burmese state’s claiming national territory refers to ancient Burmese empires as a legitimating discourse for militarily claiming territories that had been relatively sovereign lands of non-Burman people, those who were integrated as
minority “national races” into postcolonial Burma. However, as Chapter 4 highlights, the nationalist imagination of historiography is very selective – both spatially and temporally. This imagination also shows how the Burmese military-state has advanced into formerly unreachable territories belonging to ethnic minorities, who have fought back against the state to reclaim indigenous self-determination through military means. Thus, to borrow from Peluso and Lund, “If war is regarded as the continuation of state policy by other means, . . . so is violence an integral element of land control” (2011:676).

### 2.3. Capitalism and Dispossession

Like colonial rule, the postcolonial political project of national sovereignty comes into violent conflict with indigenous self-determination. Moreover, while colonial societies are able to depart from former colonial empires, they are unable to do so from the globally expanding system of capitalist social relations in which violence and exploitation are inherent (Sharma, 2015: 37).

Violence and dispossession are central features in both classic and contemporary capitalist social relations. Marx in his conception of ‘primitive’ (or ‘original’) accumulation recognizes that forceful privatization of common property and expulsion of people from their land are both a historical phase of capitalism and a precondition of capitalist accumulation (Marx, 1964). Violence in claiming lands, resources, markets as well as labour exploitation are all essential features of primitive accumulation. In addition, colonialism, slavery, oppressive legislation against peasants and poor people, and enclosure and dispossession of people from the land so as to create the social conditions necessary for capitalist profit accumulation are also features of primitive accumulation (Marx, 1964). Marx highlights the violence of primitive accumulation, saying that it is “notorious that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, briefly force, play the great part” (Marx, 1990: 836).9

9 It should be noted that capitalism is not only maintained by violence but also by “institutions, techniques, and ideas about human affairs and social goals that, for many people in the wealthy world, are unquestionable” (Mann, 2013:9).
Recent studies confirm that primitive accumulation "is an on-going process of dispossession as the market, and private property relations, enters new arenas, often driven by...the ‘opening’ of new market-friendly states" (Peet & Watts, 2004:xvi). Since the outset, capitalism has depended on “economic’ coercion of capitalist markets and ‘extraeconomic’ coercive forces” (Sharma, 2015:37; see also Mann, 2013:15-16). In the words of Rosa Luxemburg, “Force, fraud, oppression, looting are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment, and it requires an effort to discover within this tangle of political violence and contests of power the stern laws of the economic process” (2003:n.p). But by ideological separation of “economy” and “politics”, and relegating violence to the state as the authorized user of violence for the “common good” of the people, the violence necessary for capitalist social relations is made invisible (Sharma, 2015:38). Luxemburg argues that

Bourgeois liberal theory takes into account only the former aspect: the realm of ‘peaceful competition’, the marvels of technology and pure commodity exchange; it separates it strictly from the other aspect: the realm of capital’s blustering violence which is regarded as more or less incidental to foreign policy and quite independent of the economic sphere of capital.

In reality, political power is nothing but a vehicle for the economic process. The conditions for the reproduction of capital provide the organic link between these two aspects of the accumulation of capital. The historical career of capitalism can only be appreciated by taking them together. ‘Sweating blood and filth with every pore from head to toe’ characterizes not only the birth of capital but also its progress in the world at every step, and thus capitalism prepares its own downfall under ever more violent contortions and convulsions (Luxemburg, 2003:n.p).

One major outcome of violence in the process of reproducing capitalist social relations has been dispossession, since capitalist production depends on the alienation of producers from the means of production. Marx highlights long processes of violence in which people are left with nothing other than labour to sell. The renewed interest in the theoretical debate over primitive accumulation points to the fact that contemporary forms of primitive accumulation are not necessarily confined to proletarianization (Glassman, 2006). They also confirm Marx’s classic claim that those dispossessed from land do not immediately become industrial labour but, nevertheless, become part of the reserve army
of labour as their labour and mobility are controlled through legal and oppressive mechanisms (Glassman, 2006; Li, 2007; Mann 2013)

For example, Tania Li finds in the Sulawesi highlands that dispossession of traditional landowners indeed generates ‘free’ labour, but few corporations employ them. In the same vein, dispossession may be disconnected from accumulation as it was intended for reasons other than profit accumulation (e.g. forest conservation) (Li, 2010a). Thus, against linear narratives of primitive accumulation that proceed from dispossession of peasants and grasping of their land to the proletarianization of the peasants, Li suggests focusing on the ways in which “capital and ‘free’ labour connect - or fail to connect - at particular conjunctures” (Li, 2010b:70).

While studies on dispossession are useful in explaining how and why people continue to be dispossessed in contemporary economic relations, they are still largely limited to expulsion of people from land. However, if one takes dispossession as an alienation of people from the means of survival, it opens up a new space to investigate different ways in which people are dispossessed. In fact, Marx’s notion of primitive accumulation is broader than expulsion from land. Lawrence and Karim (2007) point out with respect to Marx’s notion of primitive accumulation that “[i]t is not just in this forced clearing out of the people that the violent nature of primitive accumulation manifests itself; indeed, violence and force become necessary in order to compel these expropriated people to work and to conform to the discipline of the work day” (21). Marx highlights colonialism, slavery, capitalists’ use of the state and legislation or what he calls “grotesquely terrorist laws” to make people comply to the system of waged labour (Lawrence and Karim, 2007; see also Mann, 2013). Saskia Sassen (2014) explains that dispossession, or ‘expulsion’ as she calls it, in contemporary economic restructuring can range from expulsion from professional livelihood, living space and the biosphere on which people depend for survival (Sassen, 2014). This dissertation takes the debate one step further by exploring the ways in which people are detached, at various times, places and contexts, from both the means of production (i.e. land), property (cows, buffalos, pigs, paddy), and also from their legal status, and the wage income necessary to earn livelihoods. As Chapter 5 will demonstrate, villagers in Myanmar are detached from their land (as part of the government’s counterinsurgency operation) and their resources
depleted (as a result of soldiers’ looting and extortion of food and property). Chapter 9 similarly demonstrates these villagers’ experience as they migrate to Thailand where not only are they deprived of ‘proper’ legal status but also face extraction of financial resources by the Thai government through migrant registration schemes and extortion by corrupt para-state agents. Seen in this light, these people are continuously dispossessed by being detached from essential resources necessary for survival.

2.4. Securitization

Related to the keyword of dispossession is securitization. In migration research, one emerging area of study is the securitization of migration in the post 9/11 era in which regimes have adopted new surveillance technologies. Securitization, as coined by Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde (1998), emphasizes how “an issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object (traditionally, but not necessarily, the state, incorporating government, territory, and society)” (1998:21, my emphasis). Securitization is about the social construction of threats, focusing on three major elements: securitizing actors, referent objects and the audience. Securitizing actors are those "who securitize issues by declaring something, a referent object, existentially threatened" (1998:36). Usually the actors are "political leaders, bureaucracies, governments, lobbyists, and pressure groups" (1998:40). Referent objects are the "things that are seen to be existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival" (1998:36). These referents can be the state (military security), national sovereignty or ideology (political security), national economy (economic security), collective identities (societal security), and species or habitats (environmental security). The audience is a group of people that needs to be convinced of the threat before legitimate actions can be taken. In terms of process, the actors utilize ‘speech acts’, i.e. linguistic construction of the threat to convince the audience of the danger to the referents.

In popular media and policy circles, refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants are frequently associated with terrorism, transnational crimes, diseases, and so on. They are blamed for stealing jobs, evading taxes, and relying on public services (Huysmans, 2000; Nyers, 2005; Soguk, 1999). Moreover, they are seen as diluting national culture (Huysmans, 2000). In brief, the figures of refugees, displaced people and migrant workers
are constructed as causing political, economic, and socio-cultural instabilities, thus instigating fear, panic and unease among host citizens. In such a context, securitization of migration means managing migration in the name of protecting the wellbeing of citizens (Bigo, 2002; Curley & Wong, 2008; Huysmans, 2000; Hyndman, 2000; 2007).

Securitization of migration entails materiality. It reinforces migrant workers’ identities as ‘outsiders’ and ‘illegal immigrants’ – the others who do not belong to the nation. This makes the entire migrant population vulnerable to police arrest and harassment, regardless of their ‘legal’ status (Coutin, 2005; Curley & Wong, 2008). This environment eventually forces the migrants to accept exploitative working conditions, thus creating an opportunity for the host country to acquire cheap labour (Curley & Wong, 2008).

While the concept of securitization is used largely in the literature on managing migrant workers and refugees, this study demonstrates that it is also useful in studying how some members of the nation – those who are semi-citizens such as minority groups in conflict-affected countries – are governed through discourses and practices of security. This dissertation utilizes this concept to explore the experiences of ethnic Shan when they are in Burma and when they cross the international border into Thailand. That is, it explores the ways in which the Burmese military securitizes the Shan’s labour, mobility and resources in the context of the counterinsurgency operation in Myanmar (Chapter 5). The analysis also explores the way in which the government of Thailand securitizes those Shan villagers who migrate to Thailand and “become” migrant workers (Chapter 9).

2.5. Regionalization and Economic Development

Henri Lefebvre argues that space is not a neutral entity or a pre-existing given, but an on-going production of spatial relations. It is “produced and reproduced in connection with the forces of production (and with the relations of production)” (Lefebvre, 1991:77). Doreen Massey similarly argues that space is always under construction: “it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed” (Massey, 2005:9). William van Schendel (2002), studying what he calls Zomia in Asia, also argues that areas are not pre-given or “static, timeless containers of historicity” but are products of discursive and
sociopolitical processes (2002:658-659). In other words, they are “socially produced” (658). Thus, contemporary forms of regionalization such as the Greater Mekong Subregion can be interpreted as “another round in the capitalist production and reconstruction of space” (Harvey, 2001:24) in order to sustain capitalism through geographical expansion – all in the name of production and economic development.

The production of space is closely related to the articulation of spatial scales. Just as spaces are socially produced and multiple, so are spatial scales. Neil Brenner (2004) suggests conceptualizing scale as a process such as regionalization or localization. Brenner also argues that these spatial scales are not necessarily hierarchical or exclusive to each other. Instead, they are relational, nested together or embedded in one another (Brenner, 2004). Donald Moore calls this an ‘entangled space’: i.e. a single site with multiple spatialities that are linked up to each other in terms of a national space within a region (Moore, 2005). As Chapter 7 will demonstrate, “economic corridors” where GMS regional cooperation is concentrated are the core geographic strips of the GMS program. The narrow strips do not cover the entire GMS region; neither can they be considered national nor local. They are a collection of “locals” across “national borders” serving as the core geographic areas of the GMS “regional” program (See Chapter 1, Figure 1.1).

Nationalist ideology, however, privileges the national scale as the primary reference. It forces national subjects to assume that sovereign territories are chunks of lands, exclusively demarcated from each other by unbreakable borders; the sovereign that is supposed to have control over the territory is responsible for members within that territory. Conceptually, these sovereign national spaces are seen to be at odds with global spaces (Sharma, 2015:41). But if sovereignty is defined as complete control over territory, then sovereignty is not sovereign (Sharma, 2015). For, since the simultaneous rise of the nation-state system and capitalism that began in the fifteenth century, capital trespasses national boundaries (Glassman, 1999; 2010). Murray (1971) argues that as capitalist economic activities transcend national boundaries, extended capital always requires the economic functions to be performed by different state bodies. He identifies six major functions, which he calls ‘economic res publica’ (1971:88) that include, among others,
property regimes, economic liberalization and military functions\textsuperscript{10} (1971:685). As James O’Connor points out:

The conditions of production are not produced in accordance with the laws of the market... There must be some agency, therefore, whose task it is either to produce the conditions of production or to regulate capital's access to them. In capitalist societies, this agency is the state. Every state activity, including every state agency and budgetary item, is concerned with providing capital with access to labor power, nature, or urban space and infrastructure (O’Connor, 1994:166).

In short, capital always transcends national boundaries, and national states perform various functions, including military functions, to accommodate extended capital. The fact that capital trespasses national borders and that national states need to police their borders seems contradictory. In reality, however, transnational capital requires national states to perform various functions on its behalf. Roberts, Secor and Sparke (2003:894) argue that capitalist accumulation in this contemporary neoliberal era depends on enforced re-regulation through economic and extra-economic means including military actions (e.g. the war in Iraq) by aggressively assertive state administrators. In the process of regionalization, ruling and capitalist classes form alliances across borders, and pursue divisions of labour within the alliance in which some states fulfill the oppressive function in the interest of the alliance. Chapters 7 and 8 demonstrate that various state bodies facilitate capitalist trade and investment in the region. Chapter 8 particularly shows that the Burmese military provides an oppressive function to the business of trading natural resources. Chapter 9, in turn, covers Thailand's oppressive measures against migrants to sustain cheap labour.

Moreover, far from being defeated in the era of rapid globalization, states are actively authoring regionalization (and globalization) to enhance capitalist competitiveness. Leo Panitch argues, for example, that "capitalism has not escaped the

\begin{enumerate}
\item Guaranteeing of property rights: by forces of law, the police and armed forces;
\item Economic liberalization: e.g. abolition of restrictions and standardization of currency;
\item Economic orchestration: e.g. (intervention) for harmonious production;
\item Input provision: labour, land, capital, technology, infrastructure, general manufactured inputs;
\item Intervention for social consensus: pollution, conditions of work, social security, etc;
\item Management of the external relations of a capitalist system (including military functions).
\end{enumerate}
state but rather that the state has, as always, been a fundamental constitutive element in the very process of extension of capitalism in our time" (Panitch, 1994:87). He claims that "today's globalisation both is authored by states and is primarily about reorganising, rather than by-passing, states" (Panitch, 1994:63).

In popular literature and neo-liberal discourses, regional/international organizations are portrayed as if decisions are made in international boardrooms before transmitting them to national and local levels for implementation. Jayasuria (2008) argues, however, that regionalization is “instigated within the state”, and it “runs on the tracks of the national policy processes”. Jayasuria calls this “regulatory regionalism” in which regional government is not above the state; instead, it is a “regionalized governance within the state” (Jayasuriya, 2008:21). In the case of the Greater Mekong Sub-region, national governments initiate agendas that are negotiated and fought over in GMS regional forums, which are then implemented through various administrative levels within each state.

GMS regionalization is a development project that deepens capitalist economic relations, but it is not unique. Regionalization in NAFTA (North American Free Trade Area) and the EU has a strong economic character. Richard Stubbs argues that while regionalization of the Asia Pacific is different from NAFTA and the EU in terms of, for example, less legal binding and strong interventionist states, it is what he calls the “third form of capitalism” (Stubbs, 1995). Henry Yeung (1998) similarly argues in the case of Singapore that the state actively takes up its role as an ‘entrepreneur’ in regionalization to support the outward development of Singaporean firms. Development, often framed in term of economic growth, means deepening capitalist market relations through particular orchestrations, which regionalization programs such as the GMS are about.

Regionalization involves not only state actors, however. In addition, there is a wide range of non-state actors that are trying to influence the process and outcomes of regionalization in a field of uneven power relations. Foucault (1978) provides a robust understanding of the dynamics of power relations among different actors. He argues that power is not a thing a person possesses, but is rather “the name one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society” (Foucault, 1978:93). Power is a ubiquitous and constantly changing flow depending on specific relations and the
mechanisms of power are not limited to any institution or group (Foucault, 1978). For Foucault, the essence in the analytic of power is a ‘relationship’ rather than an entity. This opens a space to examine how a wide range of actors are involved in the field of power relations, shaping outcomes or finalities.

Foucauldian concepts of power and governmentality, however, are limited in various ways. As Tania Li (2007) points out, Foucault is less interested in how governmental practices might engender ‘strategic reversals’: i.e. how governmental practices imposed from above form groups that mobilize themselves to resist governmental practices. This points to the need for Gramsci’s conceptualization of hegemony, which is not complete but engenders resistance (Gramsci, 1971). For Gramsci, an understanding of this complex struggle of social groups requires considering identity politics and the politics of positioning (Li, 2007). His formulation helps in understanding how social groups that are engaged in situated struggles are diverse and fragmented, and how collective, critical practices among these fragmented groups can emerge through cultural practices (Li, 2007). Following Gramsci, Donald Moore similarly claims that culture is a terrain of political struggle. That is, it produces subjectivities, identities and interests, while it legitimizes subordination. In the same vein, culture plays its “role as medium and ground for contesting social and political inequalities” (Moore 2005: 10; see also Li, 2007; Sturgeon, 2012). This dissertation pays attention to such cultural politics through identity-based armed struggles and the social movements of ethnic minority peoples. The analysis reveals how these struggles and campaigns that contest the national states and GMS regional initiatives influence governmental practices of the states and the GMS.

2.6. Summary

To summarize my conceptual approach, GMS regionalization is authored by the states, alongside a wide range of non-state actors including non-governmental organizations and private corporations, while at the same time it is contested by identity and interest-based movements of ethnic minority peoples. GMS regionalization is a new round in the production of space for capitalist production in which violent enclosure and dispossession of people are central features. It is the political patron’s claiming of a
protected space for their economic clients (Thomas, 1999). This violence is depoliticized in regional-level decision-making chambers through the production and reproduction of multiple spaces that are embedded in one another (i.e. national spaces within the region). Through this process, the dispossession of local people and securitization of the dispossessed are relegated to ‘national’ spaces that are beyond the legal and political reach of regional authorities.
Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The key issue this research explores is the phenomenon of violence experienced by ethnic Shan in Myanmar and Thailand in the context of the Greater Mekong Sub-region regionalization program. This study looks at the ways multiple events and processes became entangled with each other, constituting and sustaining violence for the Shan in village, national and transnational settings. It is based on multi-sited research with different types of research participants. These include migrants/refugees, officials from the governments of Myanmar and Thailand, representatives from the Asian Development Bank, and activists and NGO staffers working on issues related to migration/displacement, political conflicts, natural resource conflicts and environmental issues. The following sections explain how I planned and carried out the research.

This study involved two major types of data collection. One type was in-depth interviews and semi-structured surveys, and the other was archival research. The following sections elaborate on both types of data collection. Section 3.2. outlines the plan of research sampling, explaining the demography of research participants, the way these participants were assembled, and where and how they were interviewed or surveyed. Section 3.3 explains how archival materials were collected, followed by the methods of recording and analysis (3.4). The chapter concludes with Section 3.5 on research limitations.

3.2. Research Sample

3.2.1. Demography of Research Sample

The fieldwork for this dissertation was carried out from June 2010 to July 2013, but the intensive work was conducted in Thailand from June 2010 to October 2011. The contextual focus of the study, however, is limited to the period prior to 2011 when Myanmar was still under a military regime. The year 2011 was a turning point in the history of the
country, in that the Asian Development Bank, which sponsors the Greater Mekong Sub-region program, alongside North American and European countries, began re-engaging with the government of Myanmar vis-à-vis earlier limited engagements or economic sanctions. Nonetheless, the key aspects of this dissertation (migrant regulation, violence, hydropower projects) were continuously observed throughout the writing period to follow the issues under investigation.

This study investigated a complex web of inter-related processes, including migration from Myanmar to Thailand, the Tasang hydropower project in the Shan State in the context of the GMS regionalization program, and the violent experiences of Shan migrants in Myanmar and Thailand. To accommodate this complexity, data collection was done with multiple categories of people relevant to the issues of migration, hydropower projects, violence, and GMS regionalization. A total of 203 people were interviewed, surveyed or communicated with in other ways. On the issue of migration (refugee and displacement) in relation to violence, a total of 177 people were included in the research. Categories of people assembled for interviews and surveys were:

- Migrants/refugees from Myanmar, mostly ethnic Shan (120 persons, including 53 women).
- Migrants/refugees from Myanmar who were not ethnic Shan (10 persons).
- Staff members of NGOs and INGOs working on migrant issues (8 persons).
- Thai and Myanmar government officials, including police and immigration officers (9 persons, including 5 women, three from Myanmar).
- Former Myanmar soldiers and military officials (26 persons, including 3 women).
- Academics (4 persons, including 2 women).

On the issues of the dam, the environment and regionalization, a total of 26 persons were interviewed or engaged in informal conversations. Categories of people were:

- Activists, and staff members of NGOs (7 persons, including 3 women).
- Thai and Myanmar government officials (6 and 2 respectively; including 2 women from Thailand and 1 from Myanmar).
- Asian Development Bank officials (3 persons).
• Ethnic Armed Groups (EAG) representatives (4 persons).
• Academics (4 persons, including 1 woman).

The original working plan was to interview and survey a total of 90 participants, but the number was open throughout the research in order to increase exposure to different people with diverse experiences. By the end of the research, a total of 203 people had been included in the study, an increase that enabled the expansion of the scope of research and findings beyond the original plan. Since this study was not a statistical or regression analysis, but rather a phenomenological study to explore violence as a political process, it required openness and flexibility to every possible unanticipated case. Indeed, the study benefited from such openness in terms of approach and perspectives. For instance, interviewing former Myanmar soldiers and officers was not in the original research plan, which had been focused on the experiences of ethnic Shan who were already in Thailand. Based on Shan migrants’ responses, I decided to approach Myanmar soldiers and army officers to understand why and how they had enacted violence on civilians. The results helped illuminate their everyday hardships and poverty, entangled with counterinsurgency operations, as being a crucial element in the constitution of violence experienced by civilians.

3.2.2. Assembling Participants

Ethnic Shan on Violence, Migration, Displacement

This study primarily used a mix of purposive and event samplings in assembling research participants. For instance, when studying migrant workers, I asked colleagues in Chiang Mai who were working on migrant issues to introduce me to migrant workers who came specifically from southern Shan State adjacent to the planned the Tasang hydropower project. Given that the Shan State is the biggest ethnic state in Myanmar, with diverse socio-political conditions, I needed to be specific about finding people from areas near the Tasang dam project, where mass displacement had taken place since 1996. Through various colleagues, I then approached people by asking one after another if they knew people from the focus townships who were working in the agriculture, construction, domestic work, and entertainment sectors. Out of 130 migrants or refugees included in
this study, 95 answered (or were asked) questions about their work. The following chart shows a breakdown of their work at the time of the interviews.

Table 3-1. Shan migrants or refugees and their work (95 people)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic work</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shops, grocery stores, manual labour</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment (karaoke bar)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (asked/answered)</strong></td>
<td><strong>95</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, I asked my colleagues to introduce me to ethnic migrants other than Shan to ensure that my research sample included members of different groups. A total of 10 non-Shan migrants were interviewed, with informants from ethnic Karenni and PaO groups.

The numbers and proportions of people were purposive. Considering the time limit for fieldwork and the nature of this research, which focused more on understanding the phenomenon and process of violence rather than a statistical analysis of how many people were affected and how, I considered 130 migrants from Chiang Mai city, its nearby districts, and the border-crossing point of Fang district to be sufficient.

My study did not use any official figures provided by the Thai government, however, since they seemed to be unreliable on these issues. For example, migrant registration programs generated statistical data, but that data was based on migrants giving false information about themselves. This was especially the case during my data collection period, when the first round of what was called ‘migrant verification’ was still in process and migrants were not giving real information about themselves for fear of arrest and extortion.\textsuperscript{11} For this reason, this research did not utilize official data.

\textsuperscript{11} According to the data acquired from the Chiang Mai provincial labour office, there were only 14,438 migrants officially registered with the government. The provincial level official gave an estimate number in February 2011 that the registered number is about 50,000.
Thai Government on Migrant Regulation

To approach government officials for migration/displacement related interviews, I walked into the Police Region No. 5, Department of Immigration, and Migrant Registration Center in Chiang Mai. I was able to interview a Police Lieutenant and an officer in-charge of migrant registration. I also walked into the Provincial Labour office in Chiang Mai, where I was able to interview a senior official. After the second interview, she introduced me to officers from the Ministry of Labour in Bangkok. Through her and the Mekong Institute, I was able to interview three senior officials at the Ministry of Labour in Bangkok who were working directly on migrant registration.

Myanmar Army Soldiers for Violence

In terms of recruiting Burmese soldiers and military officers, a Burmese journalist introduced me to a former army captain who was living in Northern Thailand. He had deserted from the army in the mid-2000s and had been living in Thailand ever since. Through him, I was able to meet a key person who was helping former soldiers. This key person helped me visit a place where former Burmese soldiers and officers were living. After the extensive fieldwork, I maintained communication with them through telephone and the internet.

To contact officials from Myanmar for interviews on migration and the dam, I mainly took advantage of opportunities as they arose. Until November 2012, I was not able to conduct field research in Myanmar. Thus, I took advantage of meetings and workshops in Thailand and in the region to talk with government officials on migration, the dam and issues related to the GMS. I was also able to engage in informal conversation with two Myanmar embassy officials in Bangkok. I made phone calls to Myanmar from Thailand to follow up on conversations with officers from the Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of Labour from Myanmar. I used Gtalk (Google Talk) to communicate with two officials, telephone to interview a former senior minister under General Ne Win in the 1970s (identity of the minister withheld for confidentiality reason). Only in late 2012 was I able to return to Myanmar, where I met with various mid-level officials to get corroboration on my interpretations of violence, natural resource conflicts and displacement.
Officials from Thailand, Myanmar and the ADB on Dams and the GMS

To interview government officials from Myanmar, Thailand and the ADB on issues related to hydropower projects and the GMS program, I mainly sought to connect with them by attending meetings and workshops. I was able to meet with Myanmar government officials and ADB representatives at ADB-sponsored meetings. These opportunities also allowed me to connect and communicate with them after the meetings. Nonetheless, the information given by Myanmar officials was limited. The officials, even from senior levels, focused on “what they [the leaders] think” or “what they do” rather than providing facts from the ministries. In many instances, they referred to Burmese magazines and journals indicating that they themselves relied on the media for information. As such, engaging with government officials did not have much impact on this research in terms of added information, other than exploring their experiences, and their understanding of the issues and perspectives.

For Thai government officials on the issues of energy, dams and the GMS, I also utilized my connections with Thai environmental activists. One academic activist, who was a former government employee, connected me with her friend from the Ministry of Energy of Thailand. Through her, I was able to reach an official from EGAT (the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand). Through one person after another, I was able to interview three government officials and two former government officials.

3.3. Data Collection

3.3.1. Interviews and Surveys

For data collection, I used qualitative interviews (in-depth and semi-structured surveys) and archival methods. A semi-structured interview questionnaire was used for individual in-depth interviews with migrant workers, government officials, NGO representatives, and staff members involved in migration, the environment and hydropower projects. A questionnaire was also used to gather statistical data about migrant workers and Burmese soldiers. The following will explain the geography of data collection.
Throughout the study period, I was based at the Regional Center for Sustainable Development (RCSD) at Chiang Mai University. I traveled to different districts in Chiang Mai and Tak Provinces for interviews and surveys. In Chiang Mai City, I collected data from various construction sites where migrants worked and from migrant homes. In addition, I collected data from districts adjacent to Chiang Mai City: Mae Rim, Nong Hoi, Samoung, Hangdong and Mae Tang. I traveled to these districts on a motorbike, since they were 30 to 50 minutes away from the center of the city. I chose these migrant communities based on my relationships (via research assistants) with the migrants. I made more frequent visits to migrant communities in which I could establish better relationships with individuals who spoke Burmese.

One major site in Chiang Mai Province crucial to this study was Fang district, located about 155 km north of Chiang Mai City. Fang has been a key border entry point for Shan refugees/migrants crossing into Thailand. Unlike the relatively well-known Mae Sai border town, which has become increasingly urbanized and a key border trading point, Fang was more of a remote, rural border town where clandestine border crossing and settlement were less under the view of the central government. Fang was a key site where Shan refugees lived and worked before moving on to other parts of Chiang Mai Province, serving as both a transit point and a settlement site. As a small, remote and primarily agricultural town, Fang provided Shan migrants and refugees a safe haven. I made six trips to Fang, each time staying in town from 2 to 5 days. I travelled to remote villages in the district to interview people (60 out of 130 interviews and surveys).

I also interviewed former soldiers and officers on the Thai-Myanmar border. I visited the border about once every one to two months, each time spending three to seven days. I visited them at least two times: one in a semi-structured interview setting; another in free conversations to repeat the same questions to ensure that their answers were consistent. This was especially crucial as earlier interviews with former child soldiers had not yielded the same answers when they were repeated, and some gave information from Burmese magazines as their own experiences or perspectives. This experience taught me to repeat the same questions to soldiers and officers in different settings.
3.3.2. Archival Research

On dams, hydropower projects, electricity and the GMS

In addition to qualitative interviews (in-depth interviews and semi-structured surveys), I also conducted archival research on the Tasang hydropower project and the GMS program. I used archival materials to analyze the discourses of the GMS. The Asian Development Bank provided a large body of reports, publications, technical assistance documents, policy and planning reports, and strategic planning documents. These constituted a major source of information about the GMS regarding ideas, projects and the planning process. The ADB also provided country-specific planning documents. Meeting minutes and country presentation files on each area (energy, transportation, human resources, and so on) were also collected from the ADB online library.

For the Tasang dam project and its relation to armed conflict, I collected relevant news reports from the Nation (Thailand) and the Bangkok Post published since the 1980s. An online database called “Nexis” was used to backtrack materials on these topics from the 1970s and 1980s. The archival research proved to be a crucial source of information, as news reports covered events, issues and conversations on the dam project (and its predecessor plans) beginning in the 1980s. On the topics of electricity and hydropower projects in Myanmar as a whole, this study utilized the comprehensive compilation of news and reports from various sources complied by Eric Snider, who made them available to me. The collection is also available via the Online Burma/Myanmar Library, onlineburmalibrary.org.

On Burmese soldiers

This research also utilized autobiographies and articles written by former Burmese soldiers and officers. These comprised books written by former senior military officers, and online articles (weblogs) written in Burmese by former soldiers and mid-level officers. The autobiographies offered the perspectives and experiences of the earlier generation who had remained in Myanmar; their writings therefore reflect the dominant government position. The latter were by soldiers and officers who deserted, those of the younger generation in their early twenties, thirties and early forties who reflected on their hardships.
and the injustices they faced in the military. These constituted critiques of the military regime as they personally and professionally experienced them. The combination of these two types of writing by military personnel provided contrasting perspectives. In addition to military autobiographies, and experience-based and opinion articles, I also collected several series of publications by the Burmese Ministry of Information on issues related to counterinsurgency, ethnic affairs, development, nation-state building and Burmese nationalism.

3.4. Recording, Storing and Analysis

Each interview took about 60 to 90 minutes and included both unstructured and semi-structured questions. To interview Shan migrant workers, my research assistants introduced me to migrant communities and interpreted between Shan and Burmese. For Burmese soldiers, government officials, NGO staffers and activists, I communicated in Burmese. For Thai and GMS officers, I mostly communicated in English, except a walk-in conversation with a Lieutenant Major from Police Region No. 5 in Chiang Mai, and an interview with a Thai border control officer based in San Sai district. Communications with them were in Thai and interpreted into English by two colleagues from Chiang Mai University.

For interviews with migrants, I did two rounds of interviews. The first round was in Fang district where I did unstructured interviews with seven Shan farmers. Based on these interviews, I re-formulated semi-structured interview forms to be used throughout the research. I brought hard copies with me when I interviewed Shan migrants/refugees. As they answered questions, I wrote down the answers on the forms. The same strategy was used for interviews with Burmese soldiers.

There were a few interviews during which I did not write down the answers on the form. For these, I still wrote on a piece of paper or in my small notebook. I made sure to type up the interview notes on my computer within seven days for interviews on which I took detailed notes. For interviews when I wrote down only points or brief information, I either wrote down in my book or typed in my computer the same evening or the next day.
I also made audio recordings if research participants agreed. I transcribed these recordings, especially the most comprehensive and in-depth interviews. In general, I used the audio recordings when I typed up my notes only when I needed clarification. I stored interview notes in DevonThink database software with password protection. I saved the database in two places: one on a secure hard drive and one on my computer. In terms of coding, I used a table function in DevonThink (similar to Microsoft Excel) to create an index of key topics (e.g. en route, reason for migration, physical abuse etc.) and respective files.

During the analysis and writing process, I referred to the table to go through specific files for responses. Different types of coding software are available for research projects, but I did not use them because some of the software I tested in 2011 and 2012 did not work well with my chosen Burmese computer font. For data involving statistical information, I prepared Microsoft excel documents from which quantitative data was extracted for analysis.

Analysis of research data was conducted from late 2011 to late 2012, during which the first drafts of each empirical chapter were written (Chapters 4 to 9). Even during data collection periods, data were typed up as preliminary analysis. Summaries of findings were regularly written. These summaries helped me reflect on the next round of interviews and they also went into empirical chapters.

3.5. Research Limitations

Language: This study was conducted in primarily three languages: Burmese, English and Shan. Out of the three languages, I needed Shan research assistants to introduce me to Shan migrant/refugee communities and help me with Shan-Burmese translation. As a result, my relationship with the migrants/refugees was through the research assistants, and information depended on their interpretation. To make sure that the study captured research participants' answers, I reminded the assistants to interpret what the participants said rather than answering for them. In the earliest stage of research, the only available person to assist me spoke only the Shan language (not Burmese). I had someone translate all the documents into Shan, conduct surveys with migrants/refugees in the Shan language as I accompanied him and watched him
interviewing and surveying; then translate the notes into Burmese. Among these interviews, I destroyed the results from about 25 participants, as I was not comfortable with the process. I was then able to find two other research assistants with some research experience. Still, having to rely on the assistants to reach migrants/refugees posed a limitation on finding more ‘deviant cases’. In addition, I was not able to build long-term relationships with Shan research participants.

**Successful Migrant Stories:** As the purpose of this research was to understand the phenomenon of violence faced by the Shan in Myanmar and Thailand, the research focused on migrants and soldiers who experienced violence and poverty on a continuous basis. In the future, the stories of ‘successful’ migrants warrant further study.

**Fieldwork outside Myanmar:** I was not able to conduct fieldwork in Myanmar regarding Shan experience of violence for political reasons. Although I visited Myanmar in 2013 and 2014, I did not travel to the areas where my Shan research participants came from. I decided not to take the risk, since I had already conducted sufficient interviews and had enough archival data. Similarly, my interviews with Myanmar government officials were limited to those whom I met abroad during meetings and workshops before 2013. Conducting research in Myanmar would probably not have made a significant difference, since information from government departments was highly inaccessible, as many in-country researchers have mentioned.
PART II - VIOLENCE & DISPLACEMENT: STATE, SOLDIERS, REFUGEES
Chapter 4. Constituting Violence: Historiography of Sovereign Territorial Claims

4.1. Introduction

Although international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) cut ties with Myanmar from the late 1980s to 2012, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) continued its relationship with the military government of Myanmar. As it sustained its relations, the Bank faced multiple dilemmas and contradictions. On the one hand, the influential Western members of the Bank, including the US and European countries, imposed economic sanctions on Myanmar, blocking all loans and financial assistance. On the other hand, the Bank’s Asian members, Japan (the traditional president of the Bank), China (the oft-defender of the Myanmar government in the international community), and Thailand and Singapore (Myanmar’s neighbours and top investors) were against economic sanctions. The launching of the Greater Mekong Sub-region economic cooperation program in 1992 deepened the Bank’s dilemma. As the GMS program proceeded with billion dollar cross-border and infrastructure projects, human rights groups started criticizing the Bank, accusing it of supporting an oppressive regime.

Human rights groups argued that forced labour, involuntary relocation and human rights abuses such as torture, confinement, and sexual violence were widespread in Myanmar and that investing in that country would undermine the democratization movement by financing the corrupt, oppressive military regime. In opposition to the Asian Development Bank’s Regional Technical Assistance (RETA) to Myanmar, rights groups charged that the Bank “helps perpetuate human rights violations in Burma and, by extension, legitimizes the repressive rule of the military junta through... non-direct lending services” (BIC, Bank Information Center, n.d.). In addition, a coalition of activist groups called on the Bank to expel Myanmar from the GMS program and cut its ties with the country. The Shan Women’s Action Network (SWAN), for example, urged the Bank to

12 As indicated in Chapter 1, while the Bank continued its relations with Myanmar, it did not give direct loans.
“immediately stop ALL forms of assistance to Burma until there is irreversible democratic
reform in the country… [and to] immediately expel the regime’s representative from its
Board of Executive Directors” (SWAN, n.d.; emphasis in original).

These criticisms were legitimate. The Myanmar army had been known for its
human rights abuses across the country, which had only intensified since the late 1980s.
Forms of human rights violations ranged from involuntary labour, sexual violence, forced
extraction of funds, conscription of children into the army, and forced relocation. Raiding
villages, burning down houses, indiscriminate shooting, torture and summary execution of
villagers had been recurring events (NCGUB, 2008; SHRF, 1998; SWAN & SHRF, 2002).

While the army’s abuses had been real and human rights groups’ concerns
legitimate, the discourses of criticism against the Bank raised an important question about
the nature of violence: to what extent was a focus on the ADB’s role in dealing with Burma
adequate to understanding how violence was constituted? This question is apt not only
for the pre-2011 era, but also in the contemporary political environment.

The broad argument of this chapter is that the way violence unfolds is more
complicated than how violence at one geographic site might appear, however severe and
protracted. Understanding violence requires historicizing political economic relations
among multiple actors at multiple scales. Colonial and postcolonial conflicts over territorial
control in Myanmar -- nation-state building and claims for state sovereignty by the
government on the one hand, and struggles for self-determination by ethnic minorities on
the other – have been entangled with their struggles over the sites of important resources.
In these military conflicts, post cold-war capitalist expansion and the economic interests
of GMS member countries got implicated in the name of regional resource sharing for
development, thereby contributing to the constitution of ongoing violence. A nuanced
understanding of violence, therefore, requires an in-depth investigation into the way
history continues to be part of present day struggles through narratives of historical
geographies that justify present day conflicts, and the way multiple events at different
geographic sites and scales have become entangled with the interests and agendas of
multiple actors through time.

Empirically, the arguments in each of the sections that follow are:
The struggles for national sovereignty and indigenous self-determination have been the struggle for land. The Burmese state’s attempt to assert national sovereignty has been to claim territories they considered to be the land of their forefathers, while the struggles of ethnic minority armed groups against the postcolonial Burmese state have been to reclaim territories they consider to be their ancestral lands. It is these struggles that shape the landscapes of tension between the state and ethnic minority groups in Myanmar.

In the struggle for land, the Burmese state has presented specific nationalist discourses of history to legitimate present day claims over national territories. These narratives referred to ancient empires as the historical basis of establishing present-day legitimate, modern statehood. It was “political memories” (Baird & Le Billon, 2012) that informed the state imagination about history and geography. The socially constructed political memories were selective in that they enabled selective referencing to specific ancient Burmese empires at very specific periods, erasing multiple other histories of, for example, the Mon, Shan, and Arakan peoples. Likewise, the state discourses of the union, ethnic unity and sovereignty aiming to achieve the “modern and developed nation” discredited ethnic minorities’ political agency and delegitimized their struggle for ancestral lands.

Oppressed and marginalized, ethnic minority peoples resorted to politically inspired, culturally-based armed struggle against the Burmese state. In the Shan State, the historically contingent armed conflicts have become entangled with struggles over sites of important resources, for example the Tasang hydropower plant. In this entanglement, not only the Burmese and Shan armies, but also governments, militaries, and business interests from places beyond Burma became involved at various moments and scales, thus mutually constituting violence.

Violence in the Shan State, however, had its origins beyond the dam project or any post-colonial “ethnic conflict”. The first post-British military expansion into the Shan state took place in the 1950s in the context of fighting against the Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) forces there. Similarly, justification for war and Burmese military domination in the Shan State extended beyond the immediate pretext of counterinsurgency; the legitimating
discourses travel back to ancient Burmese histories written through anti-colonial and postcolonial nationalist political imaginations.

The chapter is organized as follows. Section 4.2 explores the nationalist state discourses that erased minority peoples’ independent histories and thereby delegitimized their struggle for ancestral land rights. In particular, sub-sections illustrate how the Burmese state’s sovereign territorial claims combined several threads: the discourses of “ethnic conflict” presented as a poverty issue, rather than a political one; “nation-state building” presented in terms of the three national causes (union, solidarity, sovereignty); “land” presented as national inheritance from forefathers; “histories” presented in terms of three ancient Burmese empires; and ethnic Burman-centric “union spirit” presented as the blood vein of ethnic unity. All these threads combined to erase ethnic peoples’ multiple and independent histories of pre-European colonial times, and delegitimized their postcolonial ancestral land claims.

Section 4.3 is the national scale analysis of the origins of ethnic armed movements against the state in postcolonial Burma. This analysis illustrates the state discourses about anti-(neo)colonialism that were used to deny ethnic peoples’ political agency and criminalize their struggle for land. It also unsettles the state discourse of historical ‘ethnic unity’ by demonstrating disagreements among ethnic groups and between them and the Burmans.

Section 4.4 is the sub-national scale analysis of the Burmese military expansion into the Shan State in the context of the anti-Kuomintang war, and counterinsurgency operations against the communists and ethnic armed groups, particularly the main Shan group led by Khun Sa.

Section 4.5 is the micro level or site-specific analysis of military violence over the Tasang hydropower plant on the Salween River in the Shan State. This section demonstrates that violence was not simply a ‘domestic’ ‘political affair’, but a transnational military-commercial issue, for it involved military actors, government officers and commercial interests that extended beyond Burma.
4.2. Struggle For Sovereignty: Denying Minority Histories and Ancestral Lands

4.2.1. State Discourse of Nation-state Building: Rendering Political Conflict as Poverty

On March 30, 2011, Myanmar President Thein Sein made an inaugural speech to the parliament. In speaking of the seventy-year old civil war, the first few points of his Burmese-language speech explained the state’s perspective on the nation, ethnic conflict and the proposed solution to the conflict. He said:

According to the historic events, Our Three Main National Causes: Non-disintegration of the Union [Pyidaungsu], Non-disintegration of national solidarity, and Perpetuation of sovereignty are the national duty not only of the present generation, but also our posterity has to safeguard until the world ceases to exist. So, our government will uphold this national duty. Our country needs three types of might to accomplish these national causes. They are (1) political might, (2) economic might, (3) military might.

Political might means national unity [a better translation would be ethnic unity]. National solidarity is very crucial for our country, home to over 100 national races. If national unity disintegrates, the nation will split into pieces. Therefore, we will give top priority to national unity.

Lip service and talk are not enough to achieve national unity. So, it is required to build roads, railroads and bridges to overcome the natural barriers between the regions of national races; to improve the education and health standards; and to lay economic foundations to improve the socio-economic status of national races. We have to improve the living conditions for national brethren, using the roads, bridges, educational institutions, hospitals and health centres. The greater number of roads, railroads and bridges the nation sees, the smoother transport there will be between one region and another, and the friendlier relations there will be among national races. In addition to material development, we will try to ensure the flourishing of Union Spirit, the fundamental requirement of national solidarity [and the true patriotism].

Despite different ideas and concepts, our people have to work closely in matters of the views of national interests. If an individual or organization stands for election in accordance with the democratic practice to come to power in a just way, that will be acceptable to everyone. Therefore, I would
say our government will keep [the door of] peace open to welcome such individuals and organizations (NLM, 2011).13

The underlying messages in his speech were the importance of the Union [Pyidaungsu], ethnic unity and sovereignty. What was most significant was the depoliticization of the seventy-year old armed conflict. There was no reference in the speech that explicitly mentioned ethnic conflict and violence. Instead, the focus was on the unity among different ethnic groups: “ethnic unity”. The President phrased the military conflict as a lack of national solidarity, which was presented as having been caused by physical distance. His proposed means for achieving ethnic unity (another word for ending armed conflict) were building physical infrastructure in geographically divided ethnic territories and fostering true patriotism: the “Union Spirit” (discussed below). Although ethnic groups had indicated for decades that their armed struggle against the Burmese state was for autonomy, self-determination and equality (see e.g. Ban, 2003; Thar, 2014; Myint, 2013; Sakhong & Keenan, 2014), the president rendered ethnic groups’ armed struggle for equal rights and self-determination as a lack of unity, lack of physical infrastructure and low socio-economic status (i.e. poverty). The means to achieve unity, as reflected in the speech, was not a political settlement but bridging territories together through “development”. The entrenched political problem was turned into a “development” problem.

The Presidential speech was a reflection of the Burmese state’s deeply ingrained ideologies and practices of nation-state building, or what Nevzat Soguk (1999) calls “statecraft”, through the narratives of Three National Causes: non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of ethnic unity, and the perpetuation of sovereignty. What gave this narrative its greatest significance were the words “non-disintegration” and “perpetuation”. They implied that the Union, ethnic unity and state sovereignty had always and already existed, but that they were now threatened and the government was trying to save them. Something could not be “perpetuated” without its prior existence. As the following discussion demonstrates, nationalist narratives of nation-state building were constructed to “reclaim” the Pyidaungsu, ethnic unity and sovereignty by means of

13 The English translation is from the state newspaper The New Light of Myanmar dated 31 March 2011.
territorial control. This practice denied the existence of indigenous people’s long-standing claims -- the reason minority peoples had waged armed struggle for their ancestral lands against the state ever since the British colonial government left Burma in 1948.

4.2.2. Land as Inheritance from Forefathers: Legitimating Sovereign Land Claims, Delegitimizing Indigenous Land Claims Through Nationalist Historical Narratives

*Till the end of the world, it’s Myanmar*

*Love the land, the inheritance from our forefathers*

*We shall sacrifice our life to protect the Union*

*This is our country, this is our land, this land belongs to us*

*Our country, our land,*

*For its prosperity, let’s shoulder the task in unity*

*It’s our duty*

*For the precious land.*

The above Burmese national anthem was adopted in September 1947, three months before Burma’s independence from the British. Written by the Burmese nationalist Sayar Tin in the 1930s in the context of the anti-colonial campaign, it has been a signature at public gatherings ever since. It was adapted from a nationalist song “Doe Bama” (We Burman), and thus had a strong ethnic Burman centrism (vis-à-vis the British and non-Burman minority populations) (OBADT, 2014). The very core of the anthem was the ownership of the land and the duty to protect it. A fundamental question that needs to be asked, however, is: what land and whose land? Although such a national discourse emerged during the colonial time in the context of anti-colonial struggle, temporal and spatial references about “our land” or “inheritance from our forefathers” go far beyond the colonial period.

The current dominant discourse has presented three ancient Burmese empires as the origin of Myanmar (Ministry of Information, 2008; 2011). The empires have been
presented as a linear progression from the First Myanmar established by King Anawrahta (1044-1077), to the Second Myanmar of King Bayinnaung (1552-1581), and on to the Third Myanmar of King Alaungpaya (1752-1760). One important signifier of these empires, as presented in the nationalist discourse, has been their territorial influence that extended to parts of modern day northeast India, Thailand (Siam/Ayutthaya) and at times even to various other parts of mainland Southeast Asia (See Figure 4.1).
Figure 4-1. First, Second, and Third Myanmar according to the nationalist narrative

There are conceptual deficits in the discourses of the First, Second and Third Myanmar. In particular, there are two key puzzling gaps. First, there is a selective referencing to specific historical moments, and presenting the rest only generically. Often times, the temporal periods of the reigns of empire founders have been highlighted (e.g. King Anawrahta, 1044-1077). What happened before and after them even in the same dynasties, and when the empires collapsed, have rarely been mentioned, as if only the reigns of the founders or the peak moments needed to be recounted. While the duration of the empires might be mentioned, these were not the defining moments. For instance, the Pagan dynasty was founded in AD 849; but only under King Anawrahta (1044-1077) did the unified and powerful Pagan Empire emerge. This empire continued to expand after Anawratha and reached its peak in the late 1100s before collapsing in 1297. But only “Anawrahta” and “Pagan” have usually been highlighted.

The so-called Second Myanmar emerged in the 1500s and lasted until the mid-1700s. The third Myanmar emerged in the 1700s and lasted until 1885 when the British invaded. Regardless of the moments of wax and wane, the nationalist discourse has presented this history as if the territorial influences were always and already extensive, instead of the reality of a cycle of expansion and retreat.

This lacuna raises the second point: what territories were actually incorporated into these empires and what happened in between the collapse of one empire and the rise of another? The First Myanmar Empire incorporated various kingdoms, including established ones such as the Thaton kingdom (established in the ninth century by Mon-speaking people who became the ‘Mon ethnic minority’ in postcolonial Burma).14 Even before the rise of Pagan, Thaton had already established a strong dynasty, an economic base, and a rich culture. Anawratha later invaded Thaton and incorporated it into the First Myanmar. Theravada Buddhism, which has been Burma’s central abiding culture since the Pagan period, actually came from Thaton.15 Once Pagan had fallen, the Mon re-established a kingdom known as Hongsawaddy (or Ramanya) in the late 1200s (see Figure 4.2). Hongsawaddy emerged between the 1420s and 1500s as the most powerful and

14 Mon history goes back much earlier. Going back a thousand years, Mon and Khmer kings ruled much of Southeast Asia (South, 2013).
15 Pagan’s invasion of Thaton was triggered by the latter’s refusal to give the scripts of Buddha’s teaching known as the Tripitaka to Pagan. Anawratha sacked Thaton and took Tripitaka, the Mon king, and artisans to Pagan.
prosperous kingdom among all post-Pagan kingdoms. It was defeated by the founder of the Second Myanmar Empire in the 1500s (Charney, 1993; Harvey, 1925; Mon, 2010; South, 2013).

The fall of Pagan triggered the rise of smaller kingdoms such as Myinsaing, Sagain, and Ava, which became one of the most powerful post-Pagan kingdoms (1364-1555) (Figure 4.2). Similarly, groups of people known as the Shan founded a unified Confederation of Shan States in the 1200s. This confederation raided Pagan near the end of the Pagan Empire. It also ruled much of today’s northern Burma until 1555. It even sacked Ava and installed a nominal king until it fell to the Second Myanmar (Tun, 2009). Likewise, history also records the kingdoms of Arakan (Rakhin) people in today’s Arakan State, such as Dannavati (3rd century AD), Vesali (9th century AD), Lemro (15th century AD) and the mighty trading kingdom of Mrauk U (18th century). Mrauk U existed until it was defeated by the Kaungbaung dynasty that established the Third Myanmar, which in turn came to an end when the British colonized Burma in 188516 (Charney, 1993; Harvey, 1925).17

16 In addition to these large kingdoms, there emerged kingdoms such as Sagain and Pinya, in-between major empires.
17 Not only were these kingdoms characteristic of the history of Burma, but also of Lanna, Sukhothai and Khmer kingdoms that rose and fell.
The nationalist narrative of history, however, has privileged the First, Second and Third Myanmars, considered to be “Burmese” empires, while obscuring the histories of numerous kingdoms, some of which were at times mighty and well established – militarily, economically, and culturally - such as Ava and Pegu. They were at times contemporaries of the Burmese kingdoms, whose rise and fall reflected the wax and wane of Ava. At times, they were tributary states providing taxes and soldiers to powerful kingdoms (Harvey, 1925; Tun, 2009). The national narrative did not ignore these multiple histories entirely, but it treated these kingdoms as insignificant, as if they were always subjugated and subordinated to the Burmese empires.
The effects of such a narrative are two-fold. First, it constructs “the” national history as the history of Burmese empires, depriving peoples such as the Mon, Shan, and Arakan independent histories of their own and an equally weighted historical standing. Second, such a historical geographic imagination has created the distorted view that Burma was once splendid, self-ruled, and far more advanced than other polities in terms of political influence, military might, economic power and civilization. In territorial terms, the Great Myanmar Empires have been presented as always extensive, the most powerful in the region; in temporal terms as continuously powerful one after another throughout history until the British annexation in the 19th century. What appears or remains as Burma today has been thought of as a non-negotiable Burmese political space. The discourses have presented that it has always been Burma and that it has to remain so; it is the land of the Burmese/Burman and the rulers have always been Burmese.

4.2.3. Union Spirit as the Blood Vein of Unity: Subordinating Minorities

The dynastic kingdoms ended during the Third Myanmar Empire, when the British colonized Burma in 1885, including the territories of the Arakan, Mon, and Shan, and Burmese kingdoms as well as the lands of Kachin, Chin, Karenni and Karen. During pre-British times, people did not think of the polities in terms of fixed territorial boundaries or people in terms of nation, race or ethnicity. The idea of nation/nationalism was not the defining feature of political life (see U Kalar, 1961). However, in the early 1900s when the Burmans started resisting British rule, ideas of nation, nation-state and nationalism were becoming global political discourses, and anti-colonialism took the form of nationalist struggles based on nationalist narratives of homeland (see OBADT, 2014). Only when earlier dynastic histories came to be used through the lenses of nation/nationalism did they become potent tools for claiming the land of ‘Myanmar.’ By this time the claims were characterized in terms of race/ethnicity and native land or indigenous land. Thinking with ideas of a modern nation-state with fixed boundaries and various nations (in terms of majority and minority), the Burman nationalists came to see themselves as the predominant and majority people while the rest were minorities, called “Taing Yin Thar” (national races or original people). Gradually, “Land” and “History” came to be imagined in terms of homeland and ancestral lands. Referencing dynastic histories, “land” was imagined as always already “Myanmar.” Any territorial disputes were aberrations from this imagining.
For the people who became minority and whose history was subordinated and obscured by that of the Burmese, the effect was the loss of entitlement to ancestral lands. They had been “made” into minorities (subjugated people) and their land was no longer specific to them, but was seen as always already belonging to the whole nation. Any claiming or re-claiming of autonomy, regardless of their own dynastic histories, appeared to the central state as a dangerous alternative to what was supposedly ‘our common land’. This was the land for whose continuity one might need to sacrifice one’s own life, as the national anthem now indicates. This effort represented the wholesale re-imagination of land and its relations to history and people. In short, “Land” began with imagination (discourses, history writing) and was then enacted as political practice.\(^{18}\) In this context, minority peoples’ political aspirations and struggles for the land they imagined to be their historical territory became outlawed.

Overruling ethnic minority people’s ancestral territorial rights in postcolonial Burma, however, was only implicit in historical geography. State discourses never explicitly said that minority people had no sovereign territorial rights. State documents only indicated that the lands were the territorial domain under Burmese rule where ethnic people had once lived peacefully (Than Shwe, 1992, in SLORC, n.d.). What was made explicit in the state discourse was Burmese supremacy. The government’s discourse of ‘Union Spirit’ presented a case in point.

The Union Spirit, as presented by the Ministry of Information (2008), can be summarized as:

(1) Deeply believing and accepting the entire union as a single family;

(2) Protecting amyo (race or nation) based on nationalism/the love of the nation;

(3) Helping, forgiving and understanding each other;

(4) Having good will and honesty.

The foundation of this spirit was the ethnic groups, those classified officially as eight major groups: the Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Chin, Mon, Burman, Rakhine, Shan and

\(^{18}\) I acknowledge Dr. Alicia Turner for her suggestion to highlight this point.
their sub-groups, *thwe chin nyi ako* (literally meaning: blood brothers) who lived on the same land and drank the same water “as if they all grew from the same tree” (Ministry of Information, 2011; 2008).

The imagination of historical and cultural geographies with regards to the Union Spirit is even more intriguing. Referring to a recent archeological discovery that purportedly proved that humans had lived 40 million years ago in the northwest of today’s Burma, a 2011 publication from the Ministry of Information claimed that these people were Burmese (or members of the ancient Burmese race). It also claimed that Burma had been the site of the origin of the human race, and that Myanmar people had lived in the area since the Stone Age. These people then dispersed to various places, and over time, depending on where they ended up, they came to speak different languages, adopted different customs, and assumed different names like the Kachin, Kayah (Karenni), Karen, Chin, Burman, Mon, Rakhine and Shan: the ‘national races’ of Myanmar. According to this line of thinking, ethnic minority groups originally descended from the Burmese who had existed in this territory for forty million years.

In short, the dominant narrative presented that today’s ethnic territories had always been parts of ‘independent and sovereign’ Burmese empires in which ethnic minority peoples had lived peacefully under Burmese rulers until the British colonial regime disrupted it (Ministry of Information, 2011). The effect of such a narrative was the normalization of assumed hierarchical relations in which ethnic minority people appeared to be natural subordinates of the Burmese — not as those living in relatively sovereign feudal states of their own, such as the Shan principalities, Chin polities and Karenni land (Harvey, 1925), that had only been subordinated to the Burmese in postcolonial Burma.

4.3. Origin of Insurgency: Struggle for Autonomy in Postcolonial Burma

The postcolonial Burmese state has been from its beginnings a strong anti-colonial and nationalist state. Government publications and official speeches have often recounted how British colonialism brought the great Burmese kingdom to its knees (Ministry of Information, 2008; 2011). The sequence of events that led to the long-running political crisis of Myanmar today purportedly began with foreign intruders (i.e. the British), suggesting that ‘foreigners’ lay at the root of the country’s political problems. This narrative
has presented the proud, peaceful, and united Great First, Second, and Third Myanmars as one long continuous rule, only disrupted by the British incursion, which shattered Burmese pride and sovereignty. The narrative has recounted that the people became ‘slaves’ of a ‘foreign race’ and lost their great accomplishments (empires, superior military might, a proud Buddhist civilization, and so on) to the British.

The British conquered Burma over three wars (1824, 1852 and 1885). After the third war, the British deposed the last king of Burma, King Thibaw, and set up a colonial administration. The British ruled the central plain regions (“Burma Proper”) directly through Indian officials as part of British India until 1938. Colonial administration ruled outlying hilly regions indirectly through traditional chiefs, such as Shan saophas and Kachin duwas (see Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3.** Burma under the British

**Source:** Encyclopedia Britannica, 1994; Kachin News, 2010
In addition to direct and indirect rule, the British exercised discriminatory recruitment policies. They recruited Christianized Karen, Chin, and Kachin into the British Indian army while excluding ethnic Burman, a majority of whom were Buddhists. In the military, the Karen populated the top echelon:

British advisors had appointed Karens as the chief of staff of the army (Gen. Smith Dun) and the chief of the air force (Saw Shi Sho); the chief of operations was the Sandhurst-trained Karen, Brig. Saw Kya Doe. The quartermaster general, who controlled three-quarters of the military's budget, was a Karen, Saw Donny. Although the Karen infantrymen who had served with the British during and before World War II had been allotted only three battalions of the reorganized postwar army, Brig. Saw Chit Khin, who was a Karen officer, was appointed to command the first infantry brigade group when it was formed in 1948. Karen officers and other ranks commanded nearly all the supporting services, including the staff, supply and ammunition depots, artillery, and signals corps (Callahan, 2005: 119).

The Burmans also felt discriminated against in the colonial bureaucracy, judiciary, and police forces, although there were Burmans in the colonial administration at different times and places (see e.g. Hingkanonta, 2015). They also felt oppressed in their country at the hands of “non-Burmans,” whom they saw as the instrument of colonial oppression, since non-Burmans in the British security and military forces had crushed Burman resistance against the British (Selth, 2002). In this political environment, the Burman nationalist movement took shape, under the assumption that the British had exercised divide and rule policies separating Burmans in the lowland from those living in outlying and/or hilly regions (such as Kachin, Chin, Shan). The Burman nationalists also thought that the British had humiliated the Burmans by using non-Burmans in their military and security forces. In their nationalist struggle for independence, they sought to reclaim independence -- not only for Burma Proper in the central region, but also for Frontier Areas inhabited by non-Burmans.

In contrast, non-Burmans considered their polities to have been independent before and during colonial times, and they wanted to remain separate from Burma Proper.

19 Non-Burman refers to ethnic minority peoples. The terms non-Burman, ethnic, Tain Yin Thar and national races do not meaningfully represent the political agency peoples such as Mon, Shan etc. But given the lack of alternative terminology, they will be referred to as "non-Burman" to distinguish them from lowland Burmese/Burman and South Asians who were involved in the colonial administration and economy.
In 1947, however, the leaders of the Burman, Shan, Kachin and Chin met at the historic Panglong Conference and reached an agreement saying that they would voluntarily join their territories together to form a Union on an equal basis, and that together they would seek independence from the British (Myint, 2013). The oft-quoted saying of the Burmese independence movement leader, General Aung San, had been “one kyat for Burman, and one kyat for non-Burman” (kyat is the Burmese currency). Aung San had promised that non-Burmans could leave the Union after ten years if they were unhappy. The political outcome was the birth in 1948 of a new nation with modern boundaries: independent Burma.

Independence, however, did not yield peace, but instead ushered in chaos and armed insurgencies from numerous ethnic and communist groups. These insurgencies originated from the limited merits of the Panglong conference agreement. First, not all non-Burmese leaders were in agreement. For instance, the Karen, who had dominated the British Indian army and whom the British had promised an independent state, did not join the conference (Khin, 1990). Neither did the Mon and Rakhine, who had had extensive kingdoms before the Burmese kings took over their territories - the ones that were also part of Burma Proper under the British. The Karenni were present at the conference only as observers. Even the Shan saophas (feudal chiefs), who were at the forefront of the Panglong conference, felt pressured by emerging anti-feudal forces in the Shan State who were supportive of a modernizing nationalist Burma. **Non-Burmans, therefore, were not fully in agreement with each other regardless of the Panglong agreement, the forming of the new Union and independence in 1948. This point underscores that there had never been any ‘ethnic unity’ that the government claimed to have existed historically.**

Second, Aung San’s promise for equality was not fulfilled and he was assassinated five months after Panglong.²¹ As a well-known saying goes, his promise was buried with him. The Burman leaders who led the government after Aung San, as well as their

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²⁰ Several groups, including Shan and Karen leaders, tried to convince the British to give them independence as separate states (Elliott, 2002).
²¹ Aung San had ambivalent positions toward his own promise. While he promised that ethnic minority peoples could leave the Union in ten years, Hugh Tucker (in Walton, 2008) argues that he still preferred a unitary state.
opponents, continued to pursue state power through Buddhist Burmese nationalist narratives of an anti-colonial state. Sakhong\(^{22}\) (2012:2) explained:

Burma, however, did not become a federal union as it was envisaged in 1947 at the Panglong Conference. Instead, it became a quasi-federal union with a strong connotation of a unitary state where a single ethnic group called the Burman/Myanmar people controlled all state powers and governing systems of a multi-ethnic plural society of the Union of Burma...

[Another] dimension of internal conflict in Burma, that arose out of independence, was ... the “nation-building” process as a process of ethnic “forced-assimilation” by successive governments of the Union of Burma. The “nation-building” process with the notion of “one ethnicity, one language, one religion” indeed reflected the core values of Burman/Myanmar “nationalism”, which originated in the anti-colonialists motto of “Amyo, Batha, Thatana”, that is to say [Myanmar ethnicity, Myanmar language, and Buddhism], and it has become after independence the unwritten policies of “Myanmarization” and “Buddhistization”, and perceived legitimate practices of ethnic and religious “forced-assimilation” into “Buddha-bata Mynamar-lumyo” (that is, to say ‘to be a Myanmar is to be a Buddhist’)....

While U Nu [Prime Minister from 1948-1962] opted for cultural and religious assimilation as a means of a nation-building process by promulgating Buddhism as a state religion, General Ne Win (1962-1988) imposed the national language policy of Myanmar [language] as a means of creating a homogeneous unitary state. Supplementing U Nu’s policy of state religion and Ne Win’s national language policy, the current military regime is opting for ethnicity as a means of national integration, by imposing ethnic assimilation into Myanmar-lumyo (lumyo means race or ethnic [group]).

Regardless of the Burman leaders’ promises to non-Burman people at the Panglong Conference regarding administrative, judiciary, legislative, language, cultural and religious equality in return for voluntarily joining the Burmans in forming a new political union, non-Burman politicians found Burman leaders increasingly dismissing their calls for equal rights. Non-Burman populations that now ‘became’ ‘ethnic nationalities’, ‘national races’ or ‘minorities’ in the new Myanmar continually demanded constitutional reform for self-determination, equal rights and federalism.\(^{23}\) Humiliated under an increasingly aggressive Burmese government, a Shan leader named Sao Noi (aka Saw Yanda) started the first Shan armed resistance, “Noom Serkharn” in 1958, followed by various other

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\(^{22}\) Lian H. Sakhong, PhD, is the head of the Burma Centre for Ethnic Studies. He is one of the lead negotiators for ceasefire between the government and ethnic armed groups in 2014-15.

\(^{23}\) See more on non-Burman political struggles from 1948-1962 (Yawnghwe, 2014; Myint, 2013; Ban, 2003; Thar, 2014; Sakhong & Keenan, 2014).
armed ethnic groups, while politicians continued pursuing constitutional reforms towards federalism (Yawnghwe, 2010).

Burman politicians saw the non-Burman political movement to amend the constitution, however, as an attempt to break up the Union. In 1962, General Ne Win’s military coup marked an outright denial of the non-Burman’s call for federalism. Ne Win’s blend of a socialist command economy, Burman-centric nationalism, and Buddhism in the name of a “Burmese Way to Socialism” resulted in the springing up of more resistance groups (Callahan, 2005; 2009).

The Karen, without waiting for the coup, started revolting against the Burmese government in 1949, one year after independence (Callahan, 2005; Thawkhunmung, 2008; 2013). Expecting British support, they demanded an independent state named Karenistan. In the context of Burman hostilities towards the Karen, in February 1947 the Karen formed a Karen National Union with its own military wing, the Karen National Defense Organization, to safeguard the right of the Karen. According to Callahan (2005:120) “…both inside and outside the formal state institutions of violence there existed a well-armed and well-trained corps of potential fighters with uncertain loyalty to the … government”. When General Ne Win discharged top Karen military officers, the deleterious consequence was the mass defection of Karen troops to the insurgency (Callahan, 2005).

The Karenni, claiming to be historically independent as per the 1875 treaty between the British and Burmese governments, had also become insurgents in 1949. Ever since that time, ethnic armies have engaged in armed revolt against the Burmese state through discourses of self-determination, equality and federalism.

For Burmese military officers, however, there had been a strong conviction that they needed to continuously engage in counter-insurgency campaigns in order to safeguard the independent nation. This conviction was rooted in their historical experience following independence. On their part, anxiety was high, as the title of a book by a former colonel, Tin Maung, indicates: “A Young Nation, A Strong Storm” (Maung, 1999). To them, their beloved hero General Aung San was dead; the independence he and his colleagues

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24 After Gen. Ne Win’s coup in 1962 and the mysterious death of Sao Shwe Theik, the key Shan Saopha of his time and the first President of independent Burma, his wife fled to Thailand and started an armed resistance movement that later emerged as a powerful and long lasting armed movement in Shan State (Elliott, 2002).
had sought by sacrificing their lives was threatened by civil war, or what was called “multi-colour insurgencies,” which had started even before independence. Ethnic unity and the Union that General Aung San had tried hard to forge were at risk as ethnic groups turned against the central government; the government was losing its still nascent military might as Kachin and Karen Rifles of the state military joined the rebellion; and many ethnic groups rose one after another, forming armed rebellions that continued for the next seventy years.

The Burmese officials did not recognize ethnic groups’ armed struggle as a political movement for constitutional reform, federalism, autonomy, and equal rights. Instead, they criminalized ethnic armed groups as “terrorist groups” (taung kyan thu in Burmese) or “criminal destructionists” (taung kyan thu a phat ta mar) attempting to break up the Union. The state claimed that during the anti-colonial era, outsiders (i.e. the British), had manipulated non-Burman groups, which was why the Panglong Agreement had guaranteed them the right of secession (Ministry of Information, 2008). After independence, foreign countries and neo-colonialists were purported to have continued to manipulate ethnic groups into opposing to the government, thus threatening national unity, the future of the union, and national sovereignty. Throughout the postcolonial period, the state considered neocolonialists to be the primary troublemakers for independent Burma in that these foreign countries had interests in breaking up the Union in order to command Burma’s rich natural resources and its strategic location between South Asia and Southeast Asia. In this light, the state saw ethnic armed groups as the victims of neocolonialist manipulation. Under this manipulation, ethnic armed groups, in the state’s view, distrusted and fought against their ‘Burmese brothers’. Minority groups’ historically contingent claims and political aspirations for territorial rights were delegitimized, and their political agency erased (even at the time of writing this dissertation when the government and ethnic groups are negotiating for peace) (Ministry of Information, 2008).

In short, the Burmese state did [does] not recognize the historically contingent territorial entitlements of ethnic peoples. Like countries in other parts of the world, it was committed to asserting central hegemonic control over the entire territory within what were considered to be modern nation-state boundaries. The re-imagining of ancient Burmese empires delegitimized the pre-British colonial era sovereign status of today’s ethnic states and territories. The historical reality of “frontier areas” having been separate territorial polities (i.e. not part of Burma) was denied by saying that any separation from a singular
polity had resulted from the British divide and rule policy. The state’s anti-neocolonial reasoning delegitimized the territorial rights of ethnic people that had been promised in the 1947 agreement. Likewise, the ongoing insurgency movements for political and territorial rights against internal colonization by the Burmese state were delegitimized as outcomes of the west’s manipulation of ethnic people, especially the designs of the United Kingdom as the past colonial ruler and the United States as the superpower of the world, to cause the disintegration of a once proud country.

The standard Burmese view held that the Burmese rulers were the real owners of every plot of land that fell within the current national boundaries of Myanmar; they had owned it since ancient times, and they were to “reclaim” and protect it from colonialists and neocolonialists (see below). The state thus tasked itself with a military mission to ‘reclaim’ the land vis-à-vis supposedly confused and manipulated armed ethnic groups. Its determination was (and is) to “wipe out until not one rebel is left” for the sake of “perpetuating” sovereignty (Thint, 2004).

This standard view can be detected in emerging autobiographies of ex-army officers. Since the early 2000s, former senior officers from the Burmese army have begun publishing their personal accounts of counterinsurgency operations in the borderlands. The titles reflect the nature of military affairs, such as “Operation After Operation” (Thint, 2004), and “Independence Struggling with Domestic Insurgencies” (Swe, 2014). The most telling book is by ex-colonel Thaung Wai Oo, published in 2007. The introductory paragraph states:

It was the time taung gyan thu a phat tha mar [literally meaning, criminal destructionists] in the Karen State, the Mon State and Thanintari Division in southern Myanmar were carrying out serious destructive activities, just like their names as criminal destructionists….. They were the coalition of three groups namely KNU [Karen National Union], NMSP [New Mon State Party] and PDP [People’s Democratic Party] that became popular recently (Oo, 2007:1).

The book’s title is “Love Myanmar, the true heritage of our ancestors”, a line from the national anthem. The story covers his experience with counterinsurgency operations in southern Myanmar in the 1970s. What the book clearly reflects is the state project to penetrate and assert control over the Mon and Karen territories militarily by calling them “heritage of our ancestors,” as if the lands had always belonged to the state. The state needed to protect itself against “criminal destructionists,” who in fact were resisting the
military state’s encroaching on their ancestral lands. In reality, however, the Burmese military mission was “internal” colonization of non-Burman lands.

This historical context explains how the Burmese state has been waging counterinsurgency violence in borderland ethnic minority areas by referring to specific ancient empires, while denying the histories of various ethnic minorities, which otherwise would provide the historical bases for ethnic peoples to claim rights over sovereign ancestral lands. Instead of recognizing ethnic people’s lands, since the 1940s the government has waged counterinsurgency operations in all areas considered to be launching pads for armed resistance to the central government, including in the Shan State.

4.4. Counterinsurgency and Military Expansion in the Shan State

Burmese military expansion and violence in the Shan State have not only been recent phenomena. The military establishment that oppressed civilian minority populations and targeted armed groups near the end of the 20th century had actually started long before the ethnic armed insurgency in the Shan State. There had been a long history of Burmese military expeditions aiming to assert state power in the areas formerly ruled by traditional chiefs and armed groups in sites that the state had previously never been able to reach. The early post-independence military incursions took place in the early 1950s, not against the Shan but against the defeated Chinese nationalist Kuomintang army (KMT) that had retreated to the Shan State as a base from which to launch a military campaign against Mao’s regime in China.

The KMT had established a base in eastern Burma, with clandestine support from the United States, to attack the newly formed People’s Republic of China (Yawnghwe, 2010; Lintner, 1994; McCoy, 1999; 2003; Sturgeon, 2005). By 1953, there were an estimated 30,000 KMT troops in the Shan State, where the KMT even set up an air base (Lintner, 1994). The Burmese leadership had become alarmed by KMT military might, territorial control along the borderlands of Burma and China, opium cultivation and trafficking, and relations with ethnic groups in the Shan State whom they recruited into the KMT. The Burmese government saw KMT influence as a serious threat to Burma’s territorial sovereignty (Ministry of Information, 1960; Lintner, 1994; Sturgeon, 2005). For
the newly-independent Burmese state, the KMT army seemed like another foreign invasion, supported by the US. In the name of preserving state sovereignty, the Burma army started military campaigns against KMT in 1953, since relying on UN intervention did not seem likely (Thint, 2004: 293). Battalions and officers known for their fighting skills were sent to the frontline. By the early 1960s, the Burmese military was able to contain the KMT, and by 1961, the Burmese military had already established a military command with infantry brigades in the Shan State. In 1972, the northeast command was set up in Lashio (Myoe, 2009:78). In addition to military commands, as part of a people’s war strategy, the government introduced para-military organizations, such as a people’s militia (pyi-thu-sit), anti-insurgency groups (thaung gyan thu sant kyin yae a poea) and Kar Kwe Ye (defense) (see numbers of militias, Myoe 1999:147). In the northeast border region, Kar Kwe Ye (KKY) had been formed as early as the 1950s. By the early 1970s, there were 23 KKY groups with 4,211 members (Myoe, 2009:148). In addition, in the 1940s and 1950s, military training schools had been established in Bahtoo, Kalaw and Maymyo (Pyi Oo Lwin), such as an Officer Training School, a Defence Service Academy, a Combat Forces School, a Burma Army Engineering Corps Center, a Burma Army Staff College (later renamed the Command and General Staff College) (Myoe, 2009:146-156). In short, military establishments in the Shan State had begun in the early independence period in the context of the anti-KMT campaign. The military infrastructure had been set up and the state had been militarized, but once the KMT were ousted, it needed justification for a continuing presence.

The communist insurgency in northeast Shan State provided a rationale for continued military operations in the Shan State after the KMT defeat. Burmese troops were sent, army bases were established and various major military operations were launched against the communists in the 1970s and 1980s, until the Burmese Communist Party collapsed in 1989 (Lintner, 1994; Myoe, 2009; Thint, 2004).

At the same time as the counterinsurgency campaigns against the communists, the Burmese military also needed to deal with various ethnic-based nationalist armed groups in the Shan State. Geographically, the Shan State is the largest ethnic state in postcolonial Burma. It is also a complex mix of multiple territories where government-supported and anti-government armed ethnic groups, including the Shan, PaO, Wa and Kokant waged insurgency campaigns against the state as well as fighting among themselves as they split and competed for territories. Major armed groups in the Shan
State in the 1980s and 1990s included the Shan State Restoration Council, the Mong Tai Army, the Shan State Army, the Shan People’s Liberation Army, the Tai Independent Army, the Shan State Revolutionary Army, the Shan United Army, the Shan United Restoration Army, the Wa National Army, the United Wa State Army, the Kokant People’s Liberation Army, the Kokant Revolutionary Force, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, and the Pao National Organization (Lintner, 1994). The plethora of names alone suggests the complexity of political relations.

To add to the confusion, armed insurgency movements in the Shan State sometimes sided with the government by becoming government-controlled people’s militias, and then later returned to being insurgency groups against the government. In addition, some of the strong Shan, Wa and Kokant forces were known for massive opium cultivation and trafficking with extensive trade routes and territorial control (see details on insurgencies in the Shan State: Yawnghwe, 2010; Lintner, 1994; Smith, 1999). Among the groups, the Mong Tai Army (MTA) with 20,000 troops (figures from the 1990s) headed by the internationally known drug lord Khun Sa (1934-2007) was the most prominent organization until Khun Sa surrendered in 1996. Without delving into the MTA and Khun Sa in detail, it is necessary to briefly describe the MTA and Khun Sa to pave way for the following section on the proposed Tasang hydropower dam.

Khun Sa was one of the key armed group leaders known internationally. He claimed to be a Shan nationalist fighting against the Burmese military regime for Shan autonomy, but he was better known to the world as a drug lord. In the 1980s, much of the illicit drugs in Southeast Asia and 60% of those imported by the US originated from his Mong Tai Army (MTA) operations (Lintner, 2000; Renard, 1996; Grundy-Warr & Wong, 2001). The US government had offered a US$ 2 million reward for his arrest. His drug-funded political-military career had originated in the 1960s, when he was head of a government-supported Kar Kwe Ye (local militia) against KMT and Shan nationalist groups. As his group’s revenue grew from the illegal drug and border trade, he was forced to disband his militia. He then turned against the Burmese government. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, through mergers and splits with other Shan groups, under different names, he emerged by the 1980s and 1990s as a Shan leader commanding about 20,000 soldiers with strong bases on the Thai-Burma border. The MTA controlled much of the 160,000 sq. kilometer Shan State (except the Kokant and Wa territories) and a chunk of
northern Thailand (see SHAN, 2006; Jaiyan, 2007; SHAN, 2011; Lintner 1994; Sturgeon, 2005).

While he portrayed himself as the leader of the Shan liberation movement, Shan nationalists saw him as an opportunist, a business person with a private army who was tainting the Shan political movement with illegal drug trafficking (see Lintner, 2000; Renard, 1996; Grundy-Warr & Wong, 2001). Some did not even see him as a Shan, but were convinced that he was Chinese and that he had always been an agent of the Burmese government (SHAN, 2006). The Shan State National Army (SSNA), which split from the MTA in 1995, accused Khun Sa of fighting against other Shan groups more than against the Burmese (SHAN, 2006; Jaiyan, 2007; SHAN, 2011; Lintner 1994). Ethnic divisions within the MTA made it less of a “Shan” army, since those in dominant positions were Chinese, while a majority of subordinates and rank and file soldiers were ethnic Shan. Shan nationalists disliked Khun Sa for his ruthlessness, human rights abuses, and even assassination of those whom he considered to be standing in his way (SHAN, 2006; Jaiyan, 2007; SHAN, 2011). His strong army, however, was weakened in 1995 when 8,000 troops, under the command of a popular colonel, split from the MTA, and in 1996 Khun Sa surrendered to the Burmese government (SHAN, 2006; Jaiyan, 2007; SHAN, 2011). During his reign, the Tasang dam was one of many sites over which the MTA and the Burmese military vied for control, as discussed below.

4.5. Tasang on the Salween: The Military Terrain of Conflict and Violence

In Khun Sa’s heyday, the area for the proposed Tasang hydropower dam was already a site of contention because of its strategic military location as well as its rich water resources. Just as violence and military expansion in the Shan State were not new, the struggle for Tasang had origins as early as the 1970s. This is not a story that can be reduced to either insurgency/counterinsurgency, or to a struggle for political equality or for purely business interests. The struggle for Tasang combined all of these, including commercial interests from people in Burma and beyond and the armies of ethnic minorities.

The planned Tasang dam site is located on the Salween River between Mong Pan and Mong Tong townships in the Shan State, eastern Myanmar, about 130 km from
Thailand’s northern city of Chiang Mai (about 90 kilometers away from the Thai-Myanmar border) (Salween Watch & SEARIN, 2004). The US$ 6 billion dam, with a 228-meter height and 870 square kilometers of potential flooded area, was supposed to be the largest in Southeast Asia if it was ever built (Sapawa, 2006). The 7110 megawatt dam would produce 35,446 GW annually, and 80% of the electricity would be sold to Thailand. Tasang was only one project out of a series of hydroelectric dams and water diversion plans along the Salween River and its tributaries. The numbers of projects to be developed as well as their sizes and capacities have not yet been settled. The most frequently mentioned projects on the Salween in recent years have been the Tasang, Hutgyi, Wai Gyi, Daung Gwin, and Ywarthit. All of these were located in conflict zones in eastern Myanmar (Sapawa, 2006) (see Figure 4.4).

Among these projects, Tasang and Hutgyi were listed in Thailand’s Power Development Plans (2003, 2010) as potential projects from which Thailand projected to import power in coming decades. Similarly, these projects were identified as part of the GMS Mekong Power Grid scheme (ADB, 1993; 2002; 2010). As part of the scheme, either one or two 550 KV transmission lines were to be connected from Tasang to Thailand (see Figure 8.1) (Caubet, 2011).25

Doctors, Dams and Militaries: A Genealogy of an Unsettled Salween

The proposed Tasang dam signified more than an infrastructure project. It was a site of struggle embedded in a long history of military and territorial conflicts. In other words, the supposedly economic aim of the Salween scheme – building hydroelectric dams and diverting water from the Salween to Thailand’s Sirikit and Bhumibol Dams -,26 had always been interwoven with military maneuvers by both the Burmese military regime and the Shan armies. On the one hand, the Burmese military saw the Salween not only as a site of potential revenue generation but also as a strategic site for territorial consolidation, potentially cutting off ethnic armed groups’ access to territories west of the Salween, which constituted the larger part of the state. On the other hand, Shan armies

25 Earlier documents from the ADB showed two 500 kV transmission lines, but recent documents (2009, 2010c) show one transmission line from Tasang to Thailand, and two lines from Shwe Li and Ta Paing projects to China.

26 In 1979, Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) announced plans to conduct feasibility studies for 14 water diversion projects on the Mekong and Salween Rivers (Terra, 2006).
such as Khun Sa’s Mong Tai Army saw the Salween projects as collateral for negotiation with both Thailand and Burma.

Figure 4-4. Proposed Salween Dam
Source. Salween Watch, 2010
The plan to develop a series of dams on the Salween River for hydropower and water diversion began in the late 1970s, supported by the Global Infrastructure Fund, a political and business association in Japan. A 1981 survey suggested building two dams on the Salween, one in the Shan State and another in the Mon State. The Japanese Nippon Koie Co., Ltd., also conducted an initial study, but the plan failed to materialize due to conflicts in the area and the physical inaccessibility of the river at the time. However, discussions between Thai and Burmese officials had taken place from time to time since the early 1980s (see Salween Watch & SEARIN, 2004; BBC World, 1980).

In April 1988, when Thailand was under Prime Minister General Prem Tinsulanon, a 150-member delegation from Thailand visited Burma, led by Army Commander-in-Chief General Chavalit Yongchaiyuth. The delegation was heavily populated with prominent military and police officers, including the air force and navy commanders-in-chief, commanders of the 1st, 3rd, and 4th regional armies, the police chief, National Security Council chief, and the Central Investigation Bureau commissioner. During the visit, National Energy Authority secretary-general Praphat Premani proposed several dams to be constructed on border area rivers. A US$ 5.8 billion hydropower project (6,400 MW) was proposed on the Salween River (Bangkok Post, 1988).

In 1989, the first Thai company that applied to develop the project was Dr. Channarong Tochuwong’s World Complex Company. Dr. Channarong had close relations with military leaders in both Thailand and Burma. He was especially close to Thai Gen. Suchinda Khraprayun, who was army commander-in-chief in 1989 and later became vice president of the National Peacekeeping Council. Dr. Channarong was well known to officers in the Internal Security Operations Command and the Army War College, as he had served as an adviser to General Athit Kamlangek, former Commander-in-Chief and supreme commander (Phu Chatkan Rai-duan, 1994).

At that time, the planned Shan State project was not at the current Tasang site. Rather, it was located north of Chiang Mai’s Wiang Hange District. Dr. Channarong proposed a 6,000 MW hydropower project, from which Burma would access 10% of the

27 Other proposed dams included Ruak River ($32 million), Kok River ($155 million), Moei River ($520 million), and Klong Ka ($26 million). Other topics discussed were the opening of five border points in Chiang Mai to import 8,800 tons of teak from Burma to Thailand.
electricity free of charge. He also proposed the diversion of 30% of the water from the Salween to the Ping River in Thailand. He justified his proposal by saying:

The goal of this hydroelectric dam project is to provide Burma with free electricity and prevent water shortages in Thailand in the future. This will also help to make up for Burma’s destroying Thai towns and cities in the past [i.e. during pre-European colonial periods in Southeast Asia] (Phu Chatkan Rai-duan, 1994). 28

The projects, totalling US$ 13.55 billion, did not materialize because the World Complex Company was not able to attract potential joint investors, according to Burma’s Brigadier General David Abel, the former minister National Planning and Development (Phu Chatkan Rai-duan, 1994).

Another company that applied to invest in the project was MDX. In the early 1990s, Dr. Subin Pinkhayan, who had held different positions (former Democrat MP, ex-minister of commerce, former President of Southeast Asia Technology Co., and a senior advisor to MDX Company) traveled to Burma to discuss dam projects. Since then, the Salween project has become a recurring topic of discussion during the visits of Thai officials. Yet, given that the planned Salween projects, including the one in the Shan State, were located in territories administered by ethnic armed groups, Thailand could not deal with the Burmese government alone. In 1994, representatives of Thai companies met with Mong Tai Army leader Khun Sa to get permission for expert and survey teams to conduct field studies. Khun Sa signalled the possibility of building the dam if the Shan State’s independence were recognized and if the details of its independence were discussed (Phu Chatkan Rai-duan, 1994; Bangkok Post, 1994a). He also agreed to water diversion to the Mae Teang in Thailand. For him, the Upper Salween-Mae Taeng project was a matter between the Shan and Thai peoples, who were ‘brothers’. In Khun Sa’s words:

I wish the Thai people to have a chance to use the river too. But they should understand that I will never allow the dam to materialize as long as Burma is involved and gets money to buy weapons (Bangkok Post, 1994b).

28 In both Thai and Burmese historical discourses, it is commonly agreed that Thai (Siamese) capitals, most noticeable Ayutthaya, were invaded by Burmese kings. The Burmese government is not shy to state the Burmese kings’ ruthless invasion of Siamese kingdoms. There are various government publications about Thai-Burma relations in which the authors proudly state how strong the Burmese kings were and how they were able to subjugate “Yodaya” (the Burmese corruption of Ayutthaya).
Chao Gunched, the President of the Shan State People’s Representatives Assembly (MTA’s political body), suggested that the dam not be at Sop Pad, but at Ta Sala, an area close to the current Tasang site, whose higher elevation would be better for water diversion to Thailand (Bangkok Post, 1994). As cooperation with Thailand would yield multibillions of dollars from the projects (dams, water diversion, and logging), both the Burmese government and Khun Sa tried to reassert territorial control. For Khun Sa, the Salween, the forest and other natural resources belonged exclusively to the Shan:

You see the Salween River doesn’t belong to the Burmese, it belongs to us – the Thai Yai. If Thais think about utilizing our four main rivers (Nam Salween, Nam Muang Phuek, Nam Muang Sat, Nam Muang Loi), the Thai brothers, the Thai millionaires and the Thais in the private sector should help Khun Sa a bit. Once we can stand up against the Burmese, we will drive them back to where they belong. And Thais can make use of the rivers.... The Burmese have only the rice and the sea to depend on, nothing else. All the rest of the natural resources that they are selling to foreigners belongs to us, the Thai Yai, so may I request everyone not to buy Burmese goods. Those goods actually belong to us, the Thai Yai (The Nation, 1994a).

The Burmese government, meanwhile, was prepared to ‘wipe out’ the MTA, in addition to all other ethnic armed groups. This was reflected in the statements of military generals. For instance, Brigadier General David Abel said, “There are no minority groups in Burma. We are a union. We are the ones who will eliminate Khun Sa” (Phu Chatkan Rai-duan, 1994). Even more boldly, General Maung Thint, then minister of Development for Border Areas and National Races, said the government would “wipe out” Khun Sa (The Nation, 1994b).

In February 1995, Burmese Energy Minister, Khin Maung Thein, visited Thailand to discuss the Salween project with Thailand’s interior minister Major General Sanan Khachonprasat. In the same year, Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra, then foreign minister for Thailand, revealed that Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt had allowed Thailand to conduct feasibility studies for Salween projects in areas under central government control. Khun Sa, in response, threatened to disrupt any project in his territory if he was not consulted (The Nation, 1995).

When news about the discussion between Thai companies and Khun Sa on a potential dam project was released in 1994, the Burmese military was already mobilizing more than 10,000 troops into the eastern Salween area to confront Khun Sa and his MTA.
At the same time, more than 5,000 troops were marching towards the potential Tasang dam area (Bangkok Post, 1994). This was only eight months after Khin Nyut had agreed to support the project, as revealed by Thaksin. Before anything concrete could proceed, the Burmese army launched a major offensive in 1995 against MTA strongholds in Mae Hong Son and Chiang Rai provinces, leading to Khun Sa’s surrender in January 1996. This confrontation does not imply, however, that the dam project was ‘the’ cause of military conflict. Although the struggle over Salween projects was certainly implicated in the military conflict, the control over the Salween projects was only one part of the story. There were various other incidents, such as Khun Sa’s declaration of Shan State independence in 1993, an act that enraged the Burmese regime, as well as his operations against the Burmese army in 1994 (Jaiyan, 2007; also Per. Comm. October 2011; SHAN, 2006). At that time, the US, under the Clinton administration, decided to increase cooperation with the Burmese regime on anti-narcotic matters (Reuter, 1995). Myanmar’s military attack on the MTA was framed largely as an anti-drug campaign. Since 1993, there had been frequent fights between the MTA and the Burmese military (Reuter, 1995). Offensive campaigns against the MTA were also part of the Myanmar military’s efforts in the mid-1990s against the strongholds of other ethnic armed groups such as the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). These campaigns were attempts to consolidate control of all areas considered to be ‘national’ sovereign territory (Bangkok Post, 1995).

In relation to the MTA, since the late 1980s, Thai military generals had already been building up relationships with Burmese military leaders. General Chavalit had been strongly against Khun Sa on the pretext of anti-drug trafficking. At that time, Thai and Burmese military leaders, as well as the US Drug Enforcement Agency, were closely cooperating with each other against Khun Sa.\(^ {29}\) In early 1987, the Thai army had dispatched army units to support the 3\(^ {rd} \) region army to push Khun Sa’s men back onto the Burmese side of the border. General Chavalit said:

> We must drive out all elements that are in our country for unlawful purposes. We cannot tolerate any use of our territory for unlawful activities…. We now have better coordination with Burma. Both Burma and Thailand want the same thing - peace along the common border…. Border problems can be easily resolved only if our neighbours are willing to talk to

\(^ {29}\) In the same period, the MTA was also fighting with the Wa army for territorial control.
\(^ {30}\) In addition, Shan Herald Agency for News reported that Khun Sa was defeated by Chinese agents. See SHAN (2006).
us and cooperate. If we have cooperation from the national down through the local level, we can solve any problem (Interview with General Chavalit by Thai Radio, 1988). In 1995, General Chavalit again supported the Burmese regime, saying that Thailand would offer “full cooperation in crushing [Khun Sa]” (Reuters, 1995).

The politics of anti-drug trafficking efforts coincided with Khun Sa’s declaration of Shan Independence (The Nation, 1994c). Khun Sa’s move had further motivated post-independence Burmese rulers to ‘wipe out’ ethnic armed groups. This effort had led to major offensives against the MTA. When Khun Sa surrendered and the Burmese military took over much of the Shan State, MDX and its subsidiary company, GMS Power, approached the Burmese government again about Salween projects. In 1998, MDX and Myanmar’s Department of Hydropower under the Ministry of Electric Power agreed to study the project. Then-Colonel Yud Serk’s Shan State Army (South), which had broken away from the MTA when Khun Sa surrendered, was still operating in territories near the Tasang site. MDX approached SSA (South) in 1999 to get permission for MDX to conduct surveys. SSA (South) reportedly agreed not to oppose the surveys, but told MDX not to build the dam without consulting the local people and NGOs, in a well taken diplomatic position (Salween Watch, 1999).

On 9 October 2006, Dr. Piyasvasti Amranand, Energy Minister of Thailand under ex-General Surayud Chulanont’s coup-installed government, said he would put off all Salween projects, since Thailand would import power from Laos (HydroWorld, 2006). This decision initially encouraged activist groups. Less then two months later, however, the minister resumed discussions, especially related to the Hutgyi dam on the Salween, during his trip to Myanmar with Prime Minister ex-General Surayud (US Cable, 2007).31

Tasang: On and Off

While different activities had haltingly moved the dam possibility along since the late 1990s, there had also been events that drew the Tasang project back. The Myanmar government became ‘annoyed’ at the slow pace of development. In 2008, the Myanmar Times quoted an energy expert close to Myanmar Ministry of Electric Power No. 1 as saying that “all hydropower joint ventures with Thailand are still suspended, despite Thai Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej’s recent visit, which focused on increasing investment

in the energy sector” (Thu, 2008). In November 2010, however, the Myanmar government signed a new US$ 10 billion project named Mong Ton for the Tasang area with China’s Three Gorges Corporation and Thailand’s EGAT International, without any reference to the Tasang dam (NLM, 2011). According to a senior official from the Asian Development Bank, this new set of investors resulted from MDX not having the necessary resources to develop Tasang (Pers. Comm., 2011).32 The Myanmar government now signed a new agreement with China as a major shareholder. Interestingly, this agreement took place just one month after the ADB had released its updated GMS Regional Master Plan for Power Interconnection (2010) in which power from Tasang to Mae Moh (Thailand) was identified as part of the planned Mekong regional power grid. Prior to the release of the report, ADB consultants had consistently mentioned Tasang as part of the plan in their official presentations (Caubet, 2010). Nonetheless, Tasang appeared only vaguely in later ADB official statements (see e.g. ADB, 2012), highlighting that the project’s future was then uncertain even to the ADB.

Another event that held back the project was the kidnapping by an ‘unknown armed group’ in May 2011 of three Chinese engineers from the Changjiang Water Resources Commission, and Changjiang Survey, Planning Design & Research Co. Ltd. The Chinese government then approached the Shan State Army (South) to help negotiate with the so-called unknown group. The kidnapped engineers were released in August the same year in exchange for a promise that the Tasang dam would not be built. Engineers from the companies, however, were back to study the area in November 2011, reportedly there until May 2012 (SHAN, 2011a4).

In brief, the Tasang dam as a large-scale, controversial project has not materialized even after three decades, but neither has it been publically terminated. This ambiguity pointed to the fact that, for both the regime and Shan armies, Tasang had been a site of violent military struggle, not just undermining potential business profits, but also sovereign territorial control. The problem had not arisen just from 1990s-2000s political and military struggles, however, since the origins of recent violent events can be traced

32 An official from EGAT also confirmed that MDX did not renew its proposal by the 2010 February deadline. There are various reasons why MDX has not proceeded with the project beside financial reasons. Thailand currently prefers to buy electricity from Laos rather than developing Tasang due to Tasang’s large financial demand, lack of security in the areas and Thailand’s existing access to electricity from Laos. Tasang is always seen as a ‘potential’ project.
back not only to the establishment of the military in the Shan State in the 1950s, but also to the narratives about ancient Burmese kingdoms that the current Burmese rulers use to claim access to the Tasang site. Moreover, struggles over the Tasang project have not just been a domestic political affair; the project has also involved cross-border political economic dynamics.

4.6. Conclusion

The story of violence in Burma has been the story of struggle over land: the centralizing state’s struggle for ‘national’ territory on the one hand, and non-Burman populations, who ‘became’ ‘ethnic minorities’ in post-independence Burma, struggling for ‘ancestral’ lands, on the other. The Burmese state, however, had never recognized the relative autonomy of what have been called ‘ethnic states’. Referring to ancient Burmese kingdoms, the state, monopolized by ethnic Burmans, especially since the 1962 military coup, attempted to claim all the lands within present nation-state boundaries. The state tried to build a modern nation-state by referring to a specific interpretation of ancient polities thought to be ethnic Burman, while refusing to acknowledge the historical polities of non-Burman populations. Delegitimizing non-Burman peoples’ historical entitlement to their ancestral lands and autonomy, the state also delegitimized, and even criminalized, non-Burman peoples’ political and armed movements for land -- movements that emphasized discourses of self-determination, federalism and equal rights. Seeing the non-Burmans’ struggle for autonomy as a threat to state sovereignty, the Burmese state tasked itself with military missions to assert hegemonic control over what it considered to be the ‘national’ territory by “wiping out” non-Burman missions for territorial autonomy.

In this context of struggles for territory, the Tasang became implicated as a site of both military terrain and important resources. To understand the ongoing violence, Tasang should not be seen as of secondary importance to the struggles over land. Instead, the insurgency, the counterinsurgency and the Tasang dam project have all been part and parcel of violence. The justifications for such violence draw on political memories informed by particular versions of history. This complex historical and geographic struggle also involved economic interests from actors other than the Burmese state and non-Burman insurgency groups, such as politicians, business people, bankers and technicians from Thailand, China, Japan and the Asian Development Bank. Thus, the Tasang case has
provided an excellent illustration that the phenomenon of violence cannot be adequately understood by looking at one event at one geographic site at one time, but instead requires paying attention to multiple processes that have unfolded over a much longer historical period, in which multiple actors with competing political, military, ethnic and economic interests have all been involved.
Chapter 5. Political Economy of Violent Conflict: Capitalist Expansion, Securitization, Dispossession

Over 300,000 people have already been forcibly relocated from the Ta Sang dam area (Open Letter by 16 Civil Society Organizations, 2007).

I have never heard of people displaced by dams. They are displaced because of shooting (Senior Official, EGAT, 2011).

5.1. Introduction

Chapter 4 illustrated that understanding violence in relation to the Tasang project needs to consider insurgency and counterinsurgency violence over a long period of time in terms of discourses and practices of nation-state building by the government and ancestral land claims by the armies of ethnic minorities. The chapter provided a national macro-level analysis of a long history of military conflict over territorial control and access to the Tasang area. This chapter will move on to explore the relationship among violent conflict, capitalist expansion and the displacement of people.

In 2011, I spoke with a senior official of Policy Planning for the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) at an ADB meeting on regional power planning held in Phnom Pen, Cambodia. He told me privately that, “I have never heard of people displaced by dams [in Myanmar]. They are displaced because of shooting” (pers. comm., 2011). In May 2007, however, a group of 16 civil society groups, mostly based in Thailand, had sent an open letter to the Asian Development Bank, opposing the Bank’s alleged support for the military regime. A press statement regarding this letter claims, “Over 300,000 people have already been forcibly relocated from the Ta Sang dam area” (ERI, 2007). Some claimed that the planned hydropower dams were in “active war zones”, and that they therefore displace people, amidst the ensuing violence and prolonged conflict (Sapawa, 2006).

Discourses of both policy-makers and human rights groups have merit. While both sides point to problems that exist, they also present the constituents of violent social experiences in term of some legible processes that can be used to justify each side’s actions. Both viewpoints are somewhat simplistic. This chapter contributes to the discourses of policy makers and activist groups by highlighting the complex web of events,
processes and actors involved in the production of violence, none of which is easily intelligible from a quick glance in the present. Rather than attempting to depict ‘the cause’ of displacement, or to identify either military conflict or the dam project as a better explanation for displacement, this research highlights the messy picture of what has gone into the process that displaces people. The broader viewpoint includes such elements as armed conflict, military expansion, capitalist expansion, and natural resource control.

While this research focuses on the Tasang hydropower project, it recognizes that Tasang is only one of many large-scale resource extraction projects in the Shan State and that there are various other mega projects such as dams, highways, rail lines, mines, logging operations, rubber plantations, and others that are all implicated in the production of violence. Choosing Tasang serves as a case study for the purpose of analyzing the relationship between violent conflict, capitalist expansion and the dispossession of people. The study focuses on ethnic Shan and the Shan armies for the same analytical purpose, recognizing that the Shan State is ethnically diverse.

This chapter makes three arguments. The first and main argument is that the government’s attempt at territorial control in the name of nation-state building and deepening capitalist resource extraction reconfigures property relations, particularly local people’s access to land and livelihood resources. That is, as the government securitizes civilians’ mobility, labour and resources as a way to prevent ethnic armies getting access to information and resources from them, state securitization results in undermining people’s lives and destroying their livelihood bases, especially their access to land and resources. Local people are made vulnerable to poverty and physical abuse, including murder and violent dispossession, which are the ‘conditions’ that make them emigrate. Seen in this light, a better understanding of the dynamics of displacement requires looking at the ‘conditions’ of displacement, not only the ‘causes’.

Second, a nuanced understanding of violence and displacement also requires looking at “overlapping territories” involved in violent territorial claims (insurgency/counterinsurgency) and capitalist resource extraction (e.g. the Tasang dam project). Common to both is violent military involvement. This approach releases analytical inquiry from getting caught in the routine struggle over proving which factor “explains” displacement better. That is to say, the securitization of people, in and through overlapping
territories, creates poverty and puts people’s lives at risk, thus forcing people to emigrate – either voluntarily or involuntarily.

Third, people impacted by securitization do not instantly join ethnic armies. Due to their negative views and experiences with the military, either insurgency or counter insurgency, local people instead decide to migrate.33 This understanding contrasts with the global policy literature that says poverty makes people to join armed groups, thus prolonging violent conflicts (e.g. Justino, 2012). In the case of Burma, the prolonged conflict creates the conditions forcing people to emigrate, but poverty does not simply force people to join or prolong conflicts.

This chapter is organized as follows. Section 5.2 introduces the dynamics of counterinsurgency and capitalist expansion in Burma as background to section 5.3 on the securitization of people. This section highlights that the government army securitizes local people by controlling their mobility, labour and resources. It also covers the mass relocation programs from 1996 to 1998, and the protracted conflict from 1999 onward. To demonstrate processes of securitization and the creation of conditions for displacement, the section tells the story of Kham village. Section 5.4. covers security measures in regard to the Tasang project and their impacts on civilians’ decisions to migrate.

5.2. Counterinsurgency, Capitalism, Dispossession

As discussed in Chapter 4, the military-dominated regime in Myanmar has been in conflict with the armies of ethnic minorities since before independence in 1948. In the early days of independence, the Burmese government only held control over central Rangoon due to the revolts of communists and ethnic groups against the central government. With only 2,000 troops under its command, the government lost control over all territories including the outskirts of Rangoon (Callahan, 2005). As military-trained nation-state builders, they had bitter experiences with revolts by ethnic and communist armies. The attitude of the Myanmar leadership has continuously been to eradicate insurgency movements, subject ethnic minority groups to central control, and to assert control over the entire territory bounded by post-independence nation-state borders. Looking

33 I recognize that there may be cases of people joining ethnic armed groups as an alternative to poverty. However, my research respondents only reveal that they choose to migrate to escape violence.
historically, Myanmar leaders see their failure to assert complete control over what they consider to be the national territory as a threat to the survival of the nation. It has been deeply ingrained in the minds of military officers since the immediate post-independence era that absolute “territorial control” vis-à-vis non-state armed groups is the foremost state mission.34

The late dictator General Ne Win, who ran the country from 1962 to 1988, had been able to extend some territorial control in the 1970s and 1980s under the Burma Socialist Program Party regime. However, it was only in the 1990s under the SLORC regime (State Law and Order Restoration Council), headed by former Commander-in-Chief Senior General Than Shwe, that major armed groups including the Karen National Union, the Kachin Independence Army, the New Mon State Party, the Karenni National Progressive Party and the Mong Tai Army were weakened and much of their territories captured35 (Callahan, 2005; 2009; Lintner, 1999; Ban, 2003; Thar, 2014).

In regards to Shan State, the Burmese army rapidly advanced into the state in 1996 when the Mong Tai Army (MTA) surrendered (see Chapter 4 for MTA; Lintner, 1999). Yet, then-Colonel Yud Serk refused to surrender and instead mobilized the Shan United Revolution Army (SURA) against the Burmese regime. SURA then united with another Shan group and was renamed the Shan State Army South or SSA South. SSA South urged the Burmese government to negotiate, but the government instead launched a major offensive in which civilians were targeted as part of counterinsurgency attacks (SHRF, 1998). Part of the area in which SSA South operated in the Shan State happened to be in proximity to the planned Tasang dam (including to-be-flooded areas) (see Figure 5.1). This important juncture of insurgency/counterinsurgency and the Tasang dam project – the overlapping of territories – means that any attempt to omit or overemphasize either one is erroneous.

34 The Union of Burma in its postcolonial form only emerged in 1947 with the so-called ‘frontier’ areas (today’s ethnic states) voluntarily joining the central plain region of today’s Burma to create the new Union. Regardless of this reality, military leaders see ethnic territories as “our forefather’s land” that needs to be protected and preserved (See Chapter 4).
35 The Communist Party collapsed in 1989 as a result of an internal mutiny (see more in Lintner, 1990, 1994).
Figure 5-1. Shan State Army South administered territory (Yellow) and Tasang
The Tasang project’s location in the conflict zone is a reflection of a broader relation between insurgency/counterinsurgency conflicts and capitalist resource extraction. In the past seventy years, the conflict between the government and ethnic armies has taken place in borderland territories where ethnic minority peoples live. These territories also happen to be rich in natural resources that the government wants to control. Before discussing further, it is necessary to outline Burma’s turn to a capitalist market economy in the 1990s in ways that influenced military behaviour regarding resource rich ethnic territories.

**Capitalist Turn of Burma**

Beginning in the late 1980s, after the 1988 uprising, the Burmese state attempted to break away from its earlier socialist command economy by opening up to international trade and investment and embracing a market economy, still tightly controlled from the center. One main national slogan since the 1990s has been “To Become a Modern and Developed Nation”. The four economic objectives of the government were, and continue to be:

- Development of agriculture as the base and all round development of other sectors of the economy as well;
- Proper evolution of a market-oriented economic system;
- Development of the economy by inviting participation in terms of technical know-how and investment from sources inside the country and abroad;
- Ensuring that the initiative to shape the national economy be kept in the hands of the State and the national peoples.36

Burma’s attempt to open up the economy in the early 1990s faced economic sanctions from western governments due to the regime’s mass human rights violations. The Burmese junta, however, found natural resource sales to neighbouring countries as

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36 These economic objectives, alongside political and social objectives, can be found in almost all publications including newspapers, journals, magazines, books and textbooks. The government requires that all printed materials to be distributed include these state objectives. The English version used in this dissertation is taken from the state-run daily newspaper, The New Light of Myanmar.
an alternative revenue source. Since the mid 1990s, Burma has been dependent on natural resource sales to provide revenue to run the state and fund the army in containing opposition forces challenging its power (ERI, 2008).

Since the mid-1990s, the core sector that has generated state revenue for the military-dominated government has been the energy sector (oil, gas and hydropower). Since the military government’s economic opening, it has attracted joint venture investments with foreign companies. By 2008, Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) had 21 contracts with foreign energy companies (Thu, 2008; Lwin, 2008).

In terms of investment, the energy sector attracted $1.0179 billion, with hydropower alone garnering most during the 2010-2011 fiscal year (CSO, accessed Jan 29, 2012). This trend has been consistent throughout the 2000s as it accounted for more than 60% of total FDI (Lwin, 2008). Most significantly in 2007, for example, 90% of total FDI, or US$ 474.3 million out of US$ 504.8 million, came from the oil and gas sector (IHT, 2008; see also ERI 2008). The government also earned revenue from other natural resource sectors, as shown in a study by Harvard University that found that the government earned $6-9 billion from jade sales in 2011 (Dapice & Thanh, 2013), and 218.8 million from timber sales in 1999-2000 (Myanmar Times, 2011; See also Chapter 8).37

The natural resource-based economy of Burma has a specific geographic dynamic. As Figure 5.2 shows, the sites of most resources are in borderland territories where ethnic minority peoples live. Numerous dams being planned on the Salween river in the east, oil/gas fields in the west and south, and various other resource sites are located in ethnic areas, while oil/gas pipelines to Thailand and China as well as the planned Greater Mekong Sub-region international highways connecting Burma and its neighbours pass through ethnic territories. Studies have shown that the number of military units has increased near natural resource extraction sites, along gas pipelines or transportation routes (ERI, 2008; TBBC, 2010; see Section 5.3.2 below on military expansion in the Shan State). Some studies have suggested that the renewed conflict

between the Burmese army and the Kachin Independence Army since 2011 has resulted from the competition over rich resources in the north of the Kachin state bordering China.

That the military conflict takes place in ethnic territories where natural resources are located points to the fact that the Burmese government’s counterinsurgency operations in the name of nation-state building cannot be separated from its attempt at tapping into the world of a capitalist market economy. Natural resources are the economic foundation for the Burmese government’s market-oriented economic future, meaning that there is an overlapping of sovereign territorial control and capitalist penetration. Projects like the Tasang dam are not isolated, but are a reflection of natural resource-based capitalist expansion.
Figure 5-2. Ethnic Composition (5.2A), Development Projects (5.2B), and (5.2C) Ethnic Armed Group activities

Note. 5.2A shows that ethnic minority groups are concentrated in borderland areas. 5.2B shows that most development projects are concentrated in the north, east and southern borderlands. 5.2C shows ethnic armed groups in the north, east and southern parts of Myanmar.
Figure 5-3. Natural Resources Endowment – minerals, hydropower projects and oil/gas blocks
5.3. Capitalism, Securitization, Dispossession in Shan State

According to Karl Marx, “alienation” of people from the means of production is a key characteristic of capitalist social relations (Marx, 1964). In particular, “primitive accumulation” or David Harvey’s reworked term “accumulation by dispossession”, is a continuous process through which the expansion of capitalism into pre-capitalist societies depends on redefining property relations in ways that people are forcefully detached from land and common resources they have utilized for generations (Harvey, 2003). The state facilitates the process of transferring common property for peoples’ subsistence use to private property for those who appropriate it for financial profit (Glassman, 2006; Harvey, 2003). Through this process, local people’s collective ownership of the natural resources that are the basis of their livelihoods is culturally and spatially redefined by environmental enclosures that dispossess people of vital land and resources (Escobar, 2004; Gordon, 2007; Sturgeon et al., 2013; Peluso and Lund, 2011; Lund 2011). This process is often violent as resources needed for private profit are looted from resource users, often only possible with the assistance of state violence. Expansion of a capitalist economy requires ongoing war as a means to continuously expand the resource base and the market in order for the economy to work (Valentic, 2008; Watts, 2009; Escobar, 2004). Numerous scholars have noted that one major consequence of capitalist violence has been the dispossession of poor people (Glassman, 2006; Harvey, 2003; Li, 2010a; Sassen, 2014).

In the case of the Shan State, capitalist expansion has gone on alongside the state’s military conquest of ethnic territories under the pretext of counterinsurgency operations against Shan armies. The Burmese military’s successful control of the resource rich Shan State territory has meant containing Shan armies. Under the assumption that villagers are supporters of insurgent groups and that villages are secret bases of guerrilla warfare, in 1996 the Burmese government launched a mass resettlement scheme in the southern Shan State as a strategy to block resource flows from civilians to the SSA. These resettlement schemes can be seen as securitization – i.e. the framing of civilians as a security threat and managing them in ways to preserve stability and security (Bigo, 2002; Curley & Wong, 2008). In the Shan State and elsewhere in Myanmar, civilians in conflict zones have been seen either as rebels, sympathizers or supporters of insurgent groups.
providing information and resources. Civilians have been conceived of as a threat to the sacred trio of union, ethnic unity and state sovereignty -- the “referent”, in the word of Buzan et al. on securitization(1998). As threats, these civilians need to be cut off from insurgent groups for the ultimate purpose of sustaining the union, unity and sovereignty. In such a context, securitization means the governance through biopower, the detailed "administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (Foucault, 2012).

The Burmese army manages life in the Shan State by controlling civilians’ mobility, labour and resources in ways that disempower local people vis-à-vis the state. Lives have been threatened, livelihood bases destroyed, and people have found themselves being dispossessed – not only from land, but also from essential resources for survival. However, as Tania Li argues in the case of Indonesia (Li, 2010b), people dispossessed from land in the Shan State do not instantly become proletarianized or turned into industrial labour. The aim of the Burmese state is to acquire land and resources to sell to foreign countries, but not to develop cheap labour-based industrial capitalism. Dispossessed and lacking any alternative work, people find themselves manoeuvring for survival in a new, violent environment as discussed below.

Figure 5-4. Forced Relocation in Shan State (1996-1998)
Source: Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF, 1998)
Between 1996 and 1998, the Burmese army relocated about 300,000 people in the Shan State. This covered almost 1,500 villages (55,957 households) from an area of about 7,000 square km in southern Shan State (see Figure 5.4)\(^{38}\) Villagers were forced to live in strategic hamlets or *su si ywar* (literally meaning ‘combined villages’) under the strict control of the Burmese military (SHRF, 1998). Controlling people’s mobility by containing them in guarded sites is not new, however. Since the 1970s, the Burmese army has used that tactic to isolate the communists from villagers, but those operations were small-scale, covering only a few villages (Myoe, 2009; Thint, 2004). Since 1996, however, relocation schemes in ethnic territories have become massive, as many hundreds of villages were ordered to move to relocation sites. Houses and crops were set on fire, and livestock shot dead to restrict people’s access to resources outside the relocation sites (see SHRF, 1998).

Forced relocation into *su si ywar* and limiting people’s access to vital resources is one key element of a counterinsurgency tactic known as “four cuts” against insurgent groups: cut food supplies and information, extort their money and kill insurgent soldiers.\(^{39}\) By controlling civilians’ mobility and resources, the military’s assumption was that ethnic armies would be deprived of essential human and material support. In this sense, local people’s mobility was securitized for the purpose of depriving insurgent groups of human and material support bases.

The process and outcomes of securitization have been violent, facilitated by the spatial practices of counterinsurgency operations. Territorial colour-coding has been the key feature in the government’s counterinsurgency operations, in which specific sets of actions are applied according to colour codes: white areas under government control, brown areas contested between government forces and ethnic armed groups, and black areas under ethnic army administration\(^{40}\) (Interviews with ex-military officers, 2010-11). In

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38 1,500 villages are in the southern part of Shan State only. In the entire Shan State, the total number of villages affected after 1996 was 3,800.

39 Four cut tactics have been discussed in both the media and academic research, but most of them got the facts wrong. They list four cuts to be cutting food, tax money, information and recruits. As a curriculum on counterinsurgency subject at the General Staff college shows, the four cuts mean cutting food supplies, extracting money, cutting off information and killing insurgent soldiers (not simply cutting new recruits).

40 The method and system of territorial colour-coding has yet to be studied in detail.
brown areas, military acts have been less violent than those in black areas. In black areas, everyone is considered an enemy or enemy sympathizer. The soldiers have been allowed to do anything with impunity in the name of nae myae soe moe yae (territorial control) and nae myae lon chon yae (territorial security) (Interviews, 2010 to 2012). The black area can be seen as the space of exception, to borrow the words from Agamben (1998), in which ‘normal’ laws are suspended and people are made into “Homo Sacer”, or bare life, that can be eliminated with impunity.

Much of ethnic territory is considered either brown or black, as various armed groups have operated in these territories against the central government. During the mass relocation period, the southern Shan State was considered black. Since the military thought villagers were providing resources to the insurgents (either voluntarily or by force), they were seen as ‘subjects of security’ threatening the stability of the Union. Villagers were restricted to specific relocation sites under strict military control. Anyone seen outside the relocation sites (i.e. in the forest or abandoned villages) was randomly shot dead as a way to exercise total control over mobility. Villagers were also seen as the state’s enemies to be treated “harshly without mercy” (Interviews with government soldiers, 2010-2011). When the villagers were ordered to move, they were given between 24 hours to 3 days, meaning that most had to leave all their assets and belongings in the village. In addition, some people were killed, tortured, and raped (see SHRF, 1998; SWAN, 2002). From 1996 to 1998, the Shan Human Rights Foundation documented 664 confirmed cases of death, including incidents of gross murders.41

After 1998, people continued to be relocated from their villages in small groups, and in the 2000s, villagers faced dispossession in larger numbers (Aphijanyatham, 2009; Risser et. al, 2003). For instance, in July 2001, 500 houses in 29 villages in Lai Kha township were burned down, displacing about 10,000 people (SWAN, 2009). In 2010,

41 Although beyond the scope of this dissertation, it should be mentioned that the Burmese military’s counterinsurgency was not restricted to military combat measures alone; it also included socio-economic and propaganda measures, as part of what has been called a “People’s War” to win “the hearts and minds” of people to oppose insurgency (Myoe, 2009).
about 30,000 people in northern Shan State were displaced when conflict broke out between Shan State Army (North)\textsuperscript{42} and the Burmese army (SHRF, 2011).

5.3.2. **Protracted Conflict: Controlling Labour & Resources (1999 onward)**

Up to the 1990s, the military was too weak to defeat the ethnic armed groups. Border areas were too remote to control from the centre. Foreign journalists, spies, migrant workers, as well as drugs and weapons crossed the borders from neighbouring countries (Selth, 1996). The military was additionally challenged in 1988 when urban protesters and students left cities by underground channels to begin armed campaigns against the government with the assistance of ethnic armies in the borderlands (Lintner, 1994; Selth, 1996). The military thus had a new set of enemies - domestic dissidents linking up with ethnic armies that were seeking separation from Burma or greater territorial autonomy (Selth, 1996). These events coincided with political disintegration in Russia, Yugoslavia and other Eastern European states, adding to the military leaders’ concern that the Union might break up. Once General Than Shwe became Commander-In-Chief in the 1990s, his major military aim was *tat ti saut yae* or “Military Building”, a strategy to build a permanent military presence throughout the country (Selth 1996, 2002; Myoe, 2009; Callahan, 2009). In the words of Selth, the strategy would also permit “the regime to monitor political developments in the frontier districts more closely, exercise greater administrative control over those areas, better regulate cross-border traffic and improve revenue collection” (1996: 470). Under Than Shwe, the military expanded enormously in terms of organization, weaponry and territorial control. An army of 168 battalions in 1988 became a force with 504 battalions across the country by 2006, with a new Bureau of Special Operations, Regional Military Commands, 7 Regional Operating Commands (with 4 battalions under each), 21 Military Operating Commands (with 10 battalions under each) and Light Infantry Divisions (Myoe, 2009: 77-78; Selth, 2002). The number of those enlisted doubled from about 190,000 in 1998 to nearly 400,000 in the 2000s (NDD, 2011).

\textsuperscript{42} Shan State Army (North) is another major ethnic army in Shan State. It has the same name as Shan State Army (South), but they are two different organizations administering different territories.
In the Shan State, according to the Shan Sapawa environmental organization, before 1996, there were only 10 battalions in townships adjoining the planned Tasang dam project. By 2009, however, there were more than 36 battalions. Two Military Operation Commands (MOC 14 and MOC 17) were established in the 2000s, with ten battalions under each command (see Figure 5.5, Sapawa, 2006, 2009). Annual reports of the Border Consortium (formally the Thailand Burma Border Consortium) similarly show the increasing numbers of battalion headquarters and army posts in eastern Myanmar (e.g. TBBC, 2004). The Border Consortium’s surveys indicated that military outposts were strategically located at or near the sites of natural resource extraction projects and along transportation routes, including the planned regional Asian Highway sponsored by the Asian Development Bank (see Figure 5.6).

**Figure 5-5.** Expanded Military Deployment in Southern Shan State (1996-2006)
Source: Shan Sapawa Environmental Organization, 2006
Figure 5-6. Military Deployment in southern Shan State by 2010-2011
Source: Thai-Burma Border Consortium, 2011
Expansion of the Burmese military in the Shan State at the same time that ethnic armies continued to operate there meant mounting pressure on civilians. On the one hand, villagers were restricted to the relocation sites with limited resources available. They were not allowed to farm outside the sites without permission; neither were they allowed to farm on their own land back in the village (SHRF, 1998; SRDC, 2006). On the other hand, the military units comprised of poor and starving soldiers relied on exploiting the incarcerated civilians for labour and resources for their own survival (see Chapter 6 for details). For instance, the military units would force civilians to collect food and other materials from the forests, work on the military farm, and build houses for the military unit or roads to support the military. This was mostly unpaid work and the civilians had to bring their own food.

This pattern of military control continued even when villagers were allowed to return to their villages. For example, where a villager traveled or which guest stayed overnight required reporting to the authorities. As new police stations and immigration offices were established in towns, a powerful administrative body called General Administration Department under the Ministry of Home Affairs expanded its reach to the villages. People’s mobility and activities came under increasing control. In more remote areas, military units dictated every aspect of villagers’ lives. Physical punishment, forced labour, and extortion of food and other property became key features, as the following villagers’ stories highlight:

Nang Non, a Shan migrant woman in her forties, who in 2011 was working as a farm labourer on an orange orchard in Fang district in northern Thailand, recounted:

When we lived in the Shan State, we had to *lote arr pay* for the Burmese military all the time [*lote arr pay* literally means “providing free labour”]. Often it lasted from 15 days to a month…. Some people died if they were taken to the frontline as military porters. They forced us to build barracks for soldiers one week, build roads the next week, deliver bamboo or chickens to the army camp the following week. Then, the next week, they told us to send fish. When they wanted us as porters, we had to go. If we couldn’t go, we had to pay money or hire someone else. When we didn’t have money, we sold paddy. If we didn’t have paddy either, we just sold an un-harvested paddy field for a very cheap price so that we didn’t have to porter for the army…. They also demanded cooking oil, soybeans… We also had to give them rice. Bamar [ethnic Burman] didn’t let us live. They squeezed out everything from us. Even if we were not well [i.e. couldn’t
work to earn a daily wage], we had to borrow [money or stuff for the military] from other people. They demanded everything from us, and they gave us all kinds of work (Interview, 11 October 2010).

U Sai, a 73 year-old Shan farmer who had migrated to Thailand’s Fang district with his wife in early 2010, said:

We used to plant onions. Soon after the onion plants grew out of the soil, they [Myanmar soldiers’ children] cut the small plants…. Their officials told them to cultivate vegetables for the army, but they were lazy. They just dug out our plants and re-planted them on the army farm…. When they saw our animals, they shot and took them with the villagers’ small vehicle… They then sold the meat back to villagers. Each household had to buy this meat. They sold our cows’ meat back to us…. Since we didn’t have money, we had to exchange rice for the meat (Interview, 26 June 2010).

Asked what the soldiers would do when the villagers could not give them what they wanted, the common answer was that they tried their best to give whatever the soldiers asked for. Otherwise, they realized that they would be punished. Even as the villagers tried their best to meet the army’s demands, there were times when the soldiers tortured, arrested and even killed villagers. Punishments were even worse when villagers were accused of providing food and information to insurgency groups or concealing information. As one research participant said:

Before we came to Thailand, Burmese soldiers forced us to work too much… We didn’t have time for ourselves. They beat up villagers as well. I saw a lot of this, so I left the village since I didn’t want to stay there anymore. Superior officers wanted soldiers to grow castor bean plants but the soldiers forced villagers to do the job instead. They also beat and kicked villagers (Interview, 6 July 2010).

The above stories reflect the entanglement of restrictions over mobility and access to resources (in the context of counterinsurgency) and forced labour and extortion (in the context of supporting the military). These linked conditions determined where people could live and go, what work they could do and for whom, and what resources they were allowed to have (or not have). The outcome of this sustained violence was that people were forced to emigrate.
My surveys with 78 Shan research informants who migrated to Thailand in the 1990s and 2000s show that government military activities accounted for 70.2% of the decisions to migrate to Thailand. Military activities ranged from physical torture to forced relocation and murder. The most common military activities were *lote arr pay* or forced labour (27 responses), torture (22 responses), extortion/taxation and looting (19 responses) and forced relocation (14 responses). About 5% of reasons were related to military activities of ethnic armed groups; 15.7% to unemployment; and 6.61% to peer pressure. The dam project itself accounted for less than 1%, a low figure possibly because villagers were not aware of the project. They were exposed to military exploitation and violence without knowing exactly why they were being attacked.

A more nuanced interpretation of the findings suggests that rather than looking at either counterinsurgency or any other reasons as causes for displacement, we should look at the way in which military-villager relations transpired in and through overlapping territories. This entanglement threatened peoples’ lives and undermined their livelihood opportunities as the case study below demonstrates.
Before 1996, Kham (pseudonym) was a typical rural farming village where villagers were cultivating tea, peanuts and paddy. There were about 70 households (about 1,000 people) prior to 1997. Before 1979, villagers could travel relatively freely among villages and trade their crops. The village economy was not growing; it was business as usual. Although various insurgent groups (Burmese Communist Party, Khun Sa’s military and other ethnic armed groups) roamed around in the area, violence and conflicts did not become chaotic until the late 1970s. According to a former village head, Hsai Dang (pseudonym), the Burmese army and insurgent groups became more violent in the 1980s, and the situation got even worse after 1996, as all these groups were competing for control over territory and population. One group killed villagers for supposedly supporting some other group. Hsai Dang would have been killed by the Burmese Communist Party in 1980 had he not run away.

In March 1997, the Burmese army forced Kham villagers to move to the town of Kun Hein, as the village was accused of giving food to the newly formed Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA). The entire village was depopulated. Anyone seen in the village after the deadline was shot dead. About 100 villagers from Kham and nearby villages died in this incident.

According to Hsai Dang, his village was relocated because of SURA. Once SURA was formed, it was based in Kham for a short while to recruit soldiers and mobilize support. Hsai Dang suggested to the then-village head that he report SURA to the Burmese military, especially because SURA was stationed in the most intense opium cultivation area. Since people from other places also came to this area to cultivate opium during this season, he feared that information would leak to the Burmese military. The then-village head refused to report them for fear of SURA. In March 1997, information leaked to the Burmese army. As a result, the village head was killed, and within three days the whole village was evicted to a nearby town where people ended up living in Buddhist temples and some at their relatives’ houses.
In the early days of relocation, villagers were allowed to go back to the village to claim their belongings with permission documents from the army. Only a few months later, however, the military started killing anyone seen in the forest. Hsai Dang believed that this incident was because of an accusation that an armed group killed 25 bus passengers, all of whom were ethnic Burmans (Burmese). Dang asserted that the later killing of villagers by the Burmese military was retaliation for this incident, as the army assumed that villagers gave information to armed groups in the area.

The forced relocation of Kham village was an instance of securitization and state territorial control that impoverished people. First, by evicting people within three days, the military separated people from everything they owned, including goods essential for their survival. Given that Kham was a small farming village in remote Shan State, transportation systems such as trucks and roads were not available to transport the villagers’ belongings. Dang, one of the few privileged people in the village, owned a small trailer jeep (*htaw lar gyi* in Burmese) used for tilling land and transporting small items. He was able to carry personal items, chickens and paddy with him, leaving behind the rest. Many villagers left most of their belongings behind. A paramedic couple from the village, for example, lost almost all their household items when they came back to take a few belongings. Many villagers told of their experiences of having to leave their cows, water buffalos, pigs, and chickens as well as crops and household items behind.

Once they were in the relocation site, they lived on resources available from Buddhist temples and their relatives, survived by fishing in nearby rivers, or farmed on other people’s land. Dang rented other people’s farmland, and paid with paddy. He was not able to remember the exact amount, but said he could not even meet the amount of paddy needed for rent, not to mention any profit. Even then, the army ordered villagers to cultivate soya beans for export to Japan; but the army did not buy the beans. The yield was small in any case.

After living in poverty for two years, Dang requested that Regional Commander General Maung Bo allow them to return to their village. Maung Bo acceded to their request in 1999 on the condition that the village would not support insurgent groups, and that the village would give information about Shan armies to the Burmese army. Although they
were back in the village, they were not able to live in peace, as they still had to provide most of their labour and resources to the Burmese army.

During this period, Kham had to spend about 1,500,000 kyat (or US$ 1,500) each year on the military units patrolling in the area or passing through Kham. His village established a fund for this purpose. If the money was not enough, he borrowed money from other villages.

In addition, villagers had to provide free labour to the military. The most significant instance of forced labour was in 2006 when Kham village, alongside those in the village tract (about 300 households), were forced to engage in a disastrous castor bean farming scheme. They were forced to farm on 300 acres with their own money. The villagers were given three days to collect three million kyat (US$ 3,000). The warning from the army was that punishment for failure to collect this amount was eviction from the village, and for failure to farm castor beans was arrest and detention. Township officials and government employees were to be laid off if they failed to comply. In these circumstances, villagers who were still struggling with the loss of property nine years earlier were again forced to sell whatever they had, including land, crops, cows, pigs and water buffalos to meet the army’s demands. Hsai Dang managed to collect three million kyat for the soldiers to buy the castor bean seeds. The villagers, however, lost half of the seeds during transportation. Due to bad roads, seeds kept dropping from the trailer jeep throughout the bumpy road to the village. With the remaining half, villagers spent a lot of time working on farming to avoid eviction, but roaming cows and water buffalos destroyed their nascent castor bean farms. When villagers informed the army of the damage, they were told to farm again on their own lands or in house courtyards, but in the end the army abandoned the project. As a result, the village lost about four million kyat (US$ 4,000) to castor bean farming, in addition to losing time for farming for their own survival. Hsai Dang’s comment summarizes the situation:

Castor bean farming was really bad. It’s not too bad for people who have some money. But for a majority of people, it gave lots of problems. Getting money to buy seeds, and having to go to that specific land for farming was difficult. Since we had to focus on castor bean farming, we were not able to farm for ourselves.... Two-thirds of our income and resources went to the Burmese and Shan armies.
The story of Kham village illustrates that the government’s territorial control not only targeted insurgents, but also civilians by securitizing their mobility, labour, and resources. This story also illuminates the combined effects of forced relocation as well as the presence of the army, since villagers were forced to provide free labour for which they were not free to choose where and how to work. Such burdens from armed conflict and the presence of military camps in nearby villages and towns -- the “war virus” in the words of a Burmese military captain – as experienced by Kham village, were common to the villages of Shan participants in this research.

5.4. Capitalist Resource Extraction, Security, Displacement

The location of Kham village as well as various other villages that were involuntarily relocated in the Tasang dam project and to-be-flooded areas raises a question of how the Tasang plan relates to the dispossession of people. Just as controlling civilians was a violent securitization measures, the Tasang dam project was a violent project. Abuses of civilians by the military units in charge of security in the areas (both the dam site and the territory generally) often took place. For instance, a geologist who was part of a research team for surface area mapping of the Tasang site in the early 1990s recalls that underage soldiers always accompanied his team of about 25 geologists for the researchers’ security vis-à-vis Shan groups. He also recalled that drug-addicts from nearby villages were forced to raft the team up and down the Salween. He said the villagers were tied to trees to prevent them from running away while the team surveyed the Salween River⁴³ (Pers. Comm., 2012). According to an employee of HydroChina, the Tasang dam area was restricted to those who had permission from the capital, Nay Pyi Daw.⁴⁴ His company teams went to the area only with government permission and security service (Pers. Comm, January 27, 2012). According to a US embassy cable from Thailand, officials from the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT), a key player in the dam business

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⁴³ I do not take issue with these geologists. For they had little prior understanding of how exactly the military would treat local people. Once they were in the field and witnessed maltreatment, they had little say over it. The geologists I interviewed are off the hook especially because they were involved in a one-time survey only, and the project did not continue.

⁴⁴ Obtaining permission might take about seven months (if the applicants are Myanmar nationals) while potential investors from abroad could get permission sooner.
in Myanmar, also admitted that their survey teams were guarded by the Burmese Army (US Cable 2007, 07CHIANGMAI4).

This observation is consistent with NGO and media reports. In 1999, units from four infantry battalions numbering about 400 to 500 troops built up their positions along the Salween River near the planned Tasang site where a survey team was conducting a field survey in late 1998 (SHAN, 1999). The Shan Herald Agency for News reported in September 2002 that two light infantry battalions (LIB 528 and LIB 529) were deployed for the security of the Myanmar-Thai Joint River Course Survey Project in the dam area (SHAN, 2002). Moreover, MOC 17, based in Mong Pan, was responsible for security on the western bank of the Salween, while MOC 14, based in Mong Hsat, was responsible for the river’s east bank (Sapawa, 2006).

The presence of the military involved in security directly affected villagers. Shan Sapawa Environmental Organization, Burma River Network, Salween Watch, and Shan Women’s Action Network have all reported the abuses of army units in charge of security (e.g. Sapawa, 2006, 2009; SWAN, 2002). Burma River Network reported that in June 2007, the Burmese military confiscated land in Wan Mai village for an office building for MDX, a key investor from Thailand (BRN, no date). The Burmese language New Era Journal reported that in May 2002 when a survey team was conducting studies, 4,000 families were relocated from villages near the Nam Pang River, a tributary of the Salween, north of the planned Tasang project (SHAN, 2002).

Although analyzing the government’s attempts at displacing people specifically for the dam project will require many more studies, it is more methodologically and conceptually useful to analyze the insurgency/insurgency violence together with the dam project, as a reflection of broader capitalist expansion, in term of overlapping territories. Approaching the issue from the perspective of overlapping territories releases analytical inquiries from being caught in a question of whether to investigate one set of factors or another as causes of displacement. It instead allows one to see how different processes and events have taken place simultaneously and how these processes have entangled with each other through time and space. That is, the planned Tasang dam was in the heart of the forced relocation areas of 1996-1998; villages that were to be potentially flooded...
had already been depopulated by 1996 in the context of securitization. People who would have been a major obstacle to the dam project were therefore not there anymore. Rapid military expansion has taken place since the 1990s, entailing counterinsurgency operations and providing security services that entailed abuses and violence against civilians. Whether there was any dam-related activity or not, the presence of the military entailed abuses anyway. Thus, whether displacement was dam-induced or conflict-induced is less important than recognizing that the dam project, the military presence, the insurgency/counterinsurgency operations and abuses were all there, and that all these processes combined to threaten peoples’ lives and destroy their livelihood bases.

Intriguingly, however, the people who were made poor did not simply join insurgency groups as an alternative livelihood opportunity (or as a nationalist response to the Burmese soldiers’ oppression). Instead, they migrated to Thailand to earn a living. Although why people joined ethnic armed groups in Myanmar is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the findings from this research show that people facing violence and poverty rarely joined ethnic armies. While Shan armies claimed to represent civilians in the areas they administered, their legitimacy was often contested. Given that the conflict has been protracted and violent, few local people wanted to join the armies voluntarily. In addition, people have had bitter experiences with armies, whether government or ethnic armies, from extorting taxes, committing violence and drafting people involuntarily into the armies. Sai Nai, one of whose brothers was drafted into a Shan Army recalls:

They have a list of household members in each village. They have members living in or close to the villages. Each household is required to send at least one son to the Shan army to avoid punishment, especially if they have more than one son. One son is to take care of the family, and the other is to join the army. Not wanting their children to join the army, parents send their sons to towns and cities in Myanmar to study or work, or send them to Thailand (Sai Nai, Pers. Comm., April 27, 2015).

45 As this dissertation focuses on experiences of those who migrated to Thailand, those who decided to stay in the village or migrate to other villages or different towns and cities in Myanmar are not included. The findings still holds true as people were displaced anyway (to different locations) and did not join insurgency groups. For instance, Shan Human Rights Foundation (1998) claims that 80,000 people out of 300,000 villagers affected by the 1996-1998 relocation migrated to Thailand, while many more hid in the jungle, stayed in IDP camps or migrated to towns in the Shan State or elsewhere in Myanmar.
According to a former school teacher in Fang district, where Shan migrants first landed in Thailand:

People do not join Shan armies because of their bad experiences with the Shan forces extorting taxes and forcing them to provide free labour. They see militaries – both government and insurgent - as those filled with bad and dangerous people. In addition, the army pays very little money (less than US $15 a month), which is not always enough for food.

Thus, instead of joining the Shan army, people affected by securitization migrated to different villages and towns in Myanmar, and many moved to Thailand.

5.5. Conclusion

Studying the relationship between violence and displacement, this chapter argues for a need to pay attention to the “conditions”, rather than the “causes”, that displace people. In other words, this chapter argues for a need to go beyond studying how violence (insurgency/counterinsurgency or military conflict) or natural resource extraction projects displace people towards an investigation how military violence and capitalist expansion create specific political and socio-economic conditions that make people move. Empirically, an investigation of the Shan experiences shows that securitization in the form of controlling peoples’ mobility, labour and resources threatened their lives and destroyed their livelihood bases. These are the conditions that made people leave their villages. While the relationship between violent securitization and displacement is a reality, an analysis that fails to look at what exactly was securitized and what political and socio-economic conditions securitization created, is too limited. This chapter shows that bodily securitization of civilians meant controlling people’s mobility, labour and resources, and the material effects on lives and livelihood bases.

The chapter also argues that although the direct relations between the Tasang project and displacement is yet to be studied, a nuanced understanding of the causes of displacement of people is not to look at either the conflicts, military expansion, and military burdens on people, or at the dam project as causing displacement, but to pay attention to the overlapping territories in which all these processes entangled with each other. This chapter shows that military expansion and violence (insurgency/ counterinsurgency for
territorial claims) and capitalist expansion (looting natural resources) entangled with each other, creating conditions that displaced people. The chapter also demonstrates that the people impoverished by the conflict migrated elsewhere in Burma or to Thailand.

This chapter questions the common assumptions about poor people often seen in global policy papers and assessments of countries with sustained violence. These studies portray poor and unemployed people’s joining insurgency groups as prolonging violent conflict. In the case of the Shan State, this is not true. Poor people did not lack in judgment or loyalty to regimes that took care of them. They responded to violent conditions by protecting themselves and trying to find a place where they could make a safe and secure livelihood. Findings show that Shan villagers whose livelihood bases were destroyed did not simply join the Myanmar army or Shan armies. Instead, they emigrated in pursuit of a new livelihood.

6.1. Introduction

Chapter 4 illustrated that violent conflict in Myanmar is an outcome of the conflict between the state’s attempt to capture what it considers to be the ‘national’ territory and ethnic armies reclaiming autonomy over what they consider to be ‘ancestral’ lands. For both sides, the struggle is for a collective cause – for the land, for the nation. Chapter 5 showed that the Myanmar army’s securitization of civilians in the form of control over mobility, labour and resources in the context of counterinsurgency and capitalist expansion creates “conditions for displacement”.

This chapter moves beyond the macro-level analysis of violence towards the micro-level or individual level. It also moves beyond the realm of “national politics” towards studying violence in the context of everyday socioeconomic situations. It moves towards investigating if, and how, the soldiers who are the implementers of violence can be seen as victims of violence in their own world.

Investigating the everyday socioeconomic livelihood of government soldiers, however, was not on my original research agenda. During my early fieldwork in northern Thailand studying Shan migrants’ experiences with military violence when they were in Myanmar, my interviews showed that Myanmar soldiers’ extortion, especially looting villagers’ foodstuff, was a very common experience. This finding raised the question of what turns soldiers into food looters. I started interviewing former soldiers and army officers, including former captains and majors. These interviews in turn made me realize that looking solely at the soldiers’ poverty in the battlefield was inadequate, because poverty appeared to be chronic and systemic. Thus, I investigated the question of “what institutional dynamics of the military create poverty at the ‘level of the body’ so as to turn soldiers into looters on an everyday basis?”
During the seven decades of military rule, Myanmar’s armed forces, known as the Tatmadaw, had earned a reputation as an oppressive and ruthless institution whose members committed murder and sexual violence, and enforced mass dispossession, slave labor, and various other forms of oppression. While these crimes were real, mainstream explanations that treat the Tatmadaw as a homogeneous organization overlooks the mass of oppressed rank and file soldiers who also face poverty, severe inequality and injustice within the army. Moreover, focusing primarily on the civilians’ suffering obscures the corruption and exploitation within the army that results in violent relations between the military and civilians. Looking at the experiences of Myanmar government soldiers through the lens of everyday livelihoods tells a story that is rarely heard. This chapter makes three specific arguments.

First, I argue that there are systemic exploitative power relations and corruption in the military and that senior officers physically abuse and financially exploit their subordinates for personal wealth. Oppressed, exploited and chronically improvised, foot soldiers, who lack alternative income sources, further exploit civilians, often violently, for their own survival and that of their families. Seen in this light, the immediate and individual reason of soldiers’ violence against civilians turns out to be for their own everyday survival, even though the military’s institutional aim may be nationalistic nation-state building and capitalist control over natural resources. The pattern of abusive relations, exploitation and corruption is systemic in that the military has become an institution in which outright violence and exploitation by senior officers against their juniors are made possible by the fascist military discourse of “one blood, one voice, one order” that turns juniors into subservient bodies of the seniors. The culture of “pleasing the ones above and pressing the ones below” has developed whereby seniors oppress and exploit juniors who further oppress and exploit civilians as a way to offload their own hardships.

Second, dictatorial power relations that produce subservient soldiers enables officers to exploit their juniors. In particular, senior officers exploit their juniors in terms of arbitrary taxation, unpaid forced labour and cheating. As exploitation moves from the top to the bottom, wealth moves upwards enriching senior officers and generals and impoverishing soldiers and their families. Oppressed, impoverishing and lacking in alternative income sources, soldiers further exploit civilians to offload their own poverty.
Third, and conceptually, unlike global policy discourses that often correlate violence and poverty, such as that of Sambanis (2002:216), who argues that violence is “a problem of the poor”, studying the institutional dynamics of the military reveals that the relations between violence and poverty involves many actors and levels of power relations. Violent patron-client relations, uneven power relations, corruption, and exploitation are crucial elements of the story.

Patron-client relations, however, are not unique to Myanmar. They have been characteristic of rule in much of the world, including Southeast Asia, where patron-client relations continue to exist among political power holders, and between them and businesses. They also exist at various levels -- from national to village levels (Scott, 1972; Sturgeon, 2005). Sturgeon (2005) argues that patron-client relations in China under the Kuomintang and then in Burma in the late 1950s and early 1960s became violent and thoroughly exploitative as a result of the drug trade. While there may be different forms of patron-client relations, the Burmese military shows a form in which the negotiated relation between patrons and clients is characterized by outright violence and exploitation. Thus, violence is not simply a problem of the poor, but intrinsic to socioeconomic relations created by wealth-seeking power holders. Soldiers living on the backs of civilians are not unique to Burma (see e.g. Lentz, 2011 on Vietnam; Lintner, 1999 on the Kuomintang in Burma). But investigating soldiers using civilians as their support bases opens a window to explore the institutional dynamics of the military and socioeconomic relations such as class exploitation and corruption that are important to understanding violence.

This chapter is composed of six main sections. Section 6.2 briefly outlines the existing research focused on the Myanmar military. Section 6.3 looks at the sociology of poverty and violence in the Burmese military. In particular, it explores factors such as recruitment practices, starkly exploitative power relations between senior officers and junior members, and the violence that turned the Burmese military into a “spoiled military” that could exploit soldiers with impunity. Section 6.4 explores the pattern of patron-client relations and gift giving among officers that requires them to extract money from soldiers. The section outlines four specific methods of exploitation in the military. Section 6.5 then illustrates how senior officers and generals enrich themselves and impoverish soldiers.
Section 6.6 demonstrates how, and why, soldiers loot food and other property from civilians.

6.2. Research on the Myanmar Military

Research on the Burmese military is not new. Since the early 1990s, international and local human rights organizations with a mosaic of acronyms have reported human rights violations committed by the Myanmar Army in ethnic territories (KHRG, 1996; KHRG, 2014; NCGUB, 2008; SHRF, 1998; SWAN, 2002). Throughout the past two decades, the trend of reporting consistently focuses on the ‘practices’ of the army against civilians in connection with natural resource extraction (Luntharimar, 2003; Sapawa, 2006; Salween Watch, 1999; EIR, 2008), gender-based violence (SWAN, 2002), recruitment of child soldiers (ND-Burma, 2014), and forced relocation (SHRF, 1998).

Collectively, they depict the Myanmar armed forces, known as the Tatmadaw, as an oppressive and ruthless institution whose members commit, with impunity, murder, sexual violence, dispossession, labour enslavement, and various other forms of oppression. While these crimes are real, mainstream explanations that treat the Tatmadaw as a homogeneous organization overlook the mass of oppressed rank and file soldiers who also face oppression, poverty, stark inequality and injustice within the army, similar to civilians’ experience. In a sense, what goes on in villages is the mirror image of what goes on in the military. Moreover, seeing incidents of abuse as military oppression, focusing primarily on the outcomes (i.e. civilians’ suffering), and seeing these incidents through a political lens such as the power thirsty generals’ attempt to capture ethnic territories, obscures the class exploitation within the army that is crucial to understanding the violent relations between the military and civilians on an everyday basis.

Scholarly research on the Burmese military regime has situated the armed forces in such contexts as history, politics, and its institutional structure (Callahan, 2009; 2005; Hlaing, 2009; Myoe, 2009; Selth, 1996; 2002; Taylor, 1998), ethnic politics, counterinsurgency, and resource conflicts (Lintner, 1994; Smith, 1994; South, 2013), political economy (Than, 2006; Min, 2004; Brown, 1999; Jones, 2014), and refugees and displacement (Lang, 2002; Grundy-Warr and Yin, 2002). In this volume of literature,
attention is given to politics and processes at the macro-level or the relationships among Tatmadaw, ethnic armed groups, and civilians. A micro-level analysis of how the everyday livelihoods of the army members, embedded in brutal power relations, might facilitate violence against civilians has yet to be done, which this research attempts to do.

6.3. A Sociology of the Tatmadaw: Human composition, power relations, and corruption

6.3.1. Human Composition since the 1990s: Origins of Systemic Violence

As discussed in earlier chapters, the Burmese military rapidly expanded in the 1990s. Battalions increased from 168 to more than 500 between the late 1980s and the 2000s (Myoe, 2009:77-78). Servicemen also expanded from fewer than 200,000 in the 1990s to between 400,000 and 500,000 in the 2000s (ND-Burma, 2014). Such rapid expansion was not centrally financed; each battalion was required to raise its own funds. One major outcome of this unfunded expansion was the transformation of the military into an institution where criminal activities provided key support bases for human and material needs.

Perhaps the army’s one major challenge had been recruiting soldiers. According to the mid-1990s army constitution, each battalion was required to have 817 personnel (777 in 1988). Reports show, however, that some battalions did not exceed 250 members as a result of a high rate of desertion. A total of 9,467 desertions were reported between May and August 2006, and 7,761 desertions were reported between January and April 2000. Some suggest that at least 1,600 soldiers desert every month (Myoe, 2009: 78, Lwin, 2009). In order to meet the composition requirement, recruitment officers did whatever it took to recruit soldiers. This led to the conscription of children into the army, estimated to be about 70,000 throughout the 2000s (Yoma 3, 2009; ND-Burma, 2014; HRW, 2002).

According to Ko Oo, who joined the army in 2007 when he was 16, there were about 100 children out of 220 new recruits at his Military Recruitment and Training School
in Pathein, Southern Myanmar (Interview, 26 April 2011). Recruiting any easy target into the military contributed to transforming the army into an institution of “all sorts of people” (Interview, former Major Moe, 6 December 2010). Former Major Moe, who served in the military for more than two decades, said:

What has happened since 1988 is that the army has more quantity and less quality. There are more and more insane individuals. In a sense, it’s out of control. When the soldiers with low quality implement orders from their officers, they overdo things…. We can call the military ‘tat pyatt’ [spoiled military]…. When the recruitment purpose is purely for getting more and more bodies regardless of who, recruitment officers grab one from here, one from there. The army ended up having people with low education, bad attitudes and bad characters. Some of them were criminals before they found their ways to the army (Interview, 6 December 2010).

The story of Maung Nyo, a 20 year-old former construction labourer from central Myanmar, confirms Major Moe’s point. Carrying a knife or other weapon with him, he was a street fighter. In 2007, his quarrels and street-fights led to the accidental death of his rival. As he tried to escape a lawsuit, an army officer suspected him of the murder and persuaded him to join the army to avoid criminal charges and prosecution. Upon joining the army, the recruiting officer took away his national registration card, and therefore his history was erased (Interview, 26 April 2011). How his national identity card was handled, whether deposited, registered somewhere or completely destroyed, is unknown, but Maung Nyo became yet another new recruit without records. This case was not an exception but the rule regarding recruitment; recruitment officers looked for children roaming at night without a national identity card – either not carrying the card or they never had one.

Bo Bo, 25 years old and a father of two children during my fieldwork, was conscripted into the army in 2001 when he was 16. In December that year, he was coming back from the Kyite Htee Yoe pagoda festival in southern Myanmar. As he was sleeping at the Pegu train station, the train police arrested him at 1 am charging him with the crime of maung yeik kho mu (literally meaning, dwelling in darkness to commit a crime). Transferred to an army captain, Bo Bo was put in the station cell, beaten up and threatened that he would be sent to prison unless he joined the army. That he did not have a citizenship card was one major reason used against him. As a teenager without jail
experience, Bo Bo signed the form to join the army. The next day, he, together with a group of other teenagers, was taken to Mingaladon Recruitment Centre in handcuffs (Interview, October 2011).

There were also troubled children in the army. In my sample, Ko Oo and Noe Noe were troubled children who voluntarily joined the army. As young as 15, they had already developed troublesome relationships with their parents, dropped out of school, and were roaming around and running away from home. They were from working class families with little education.

But why would the military desperately ‘grab’ children and suspects? As mentioned earlier, the military had expanded the number of battalions since the 1990s. On the one hand, more soldiers were needed. On the other hand, leaving each battalion do its own financing resulted in extreme poverty within each battalion, leading to violent abuse and harsh military activity, as discussed below. The harsh conditions led to a high rate of desertion. For battalion commanders, if there were more deserters and/or fewer soldiers than needed, their reputations were threatened, affecting their chance for promotion. In order to replace deserters, battalions also bought soldiers from recruitment battalions, which, in a sense, was human trafficking. Various interviewees confirmed that their battalions paid 200,000 kyat (US$ 200) for each new recruit.

6.3.2. Transition from Nation-State Builders to Wealth Seekers

In the early history of the army, those who joined did so out of their love for the nation, and the realization of the need to protect the newly independent nation from ethnic and communist insurgencies. Former Brigadier General Than Thint, who led anti-Kuomintang and anti-communist operations from the 1960s to the early 1980s, and former deputy prime minister under late General Ne Win said:

In the old times, we were worried that the country would collapse. General Aung San had been dead since before independence; we had a communist rebellion; the Karen went underground and so on... In those times, people joined the army to protect the nation (Interview, 24 August 2011).
Moreover, having witnessed poverty, hardship and humiliation under the British and Japanese occupations, many young people - uneducated and unemployed - realized the need to join the armed forces to get the country out of misery.

While there were those who joined the military aiming for personal wealth and status during the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP) government under late General Ne Win, this period was different from the post 1988-era in which more and more people joined the military as a stepping stone towards personal wealth and status (Various Interviews, 2010-2012). That is, during the BSPP era from 1974 to 1988, although military authority was a source of potential wealth, opportunities were largely limited by closed-door, socialist economic policies and political unrest.

This drastically changed in the early 1990s, when the opening up of Myanmar’s economy coincided with rapid military expansion in which the system of self funding for each battalion unit created opportunities for officers to earn personal profits through various channels, including approving business licenses and illegal cross-border trade (Various interviews, 2010-2012). This turning point also coincided with the expansion of the Defense Services Academy (DSA) – the most prestigious academy of soon-to-be power holders. Established in 1954, DSA’s annual intake of about 250 cadets in the 1990s was increased to 2,000-3,000 in 2005, while at the same time the four-year program was reduced to three years (Myoe, 2009:147). As graduates of the most prestigious institution, these new officers acted superior to and abused anyone except their own seniors. At the same time, these officers were concerned more with their own enrichment than the welfare of Tat families (Tat means the military or military unit) (Various Interviews, 2010-2012). According to a military analyst:

You can imagine that having someone as a military officer can provide all sorts of privilege. If a family has a captain in the army, even township level authority dare not touch that family. If he gets posted in a place especially in border areas, he has the authority to approve and disapprove businesses. Business people will pay him many million kyat as a gift…. Also, his supporting officers at different levels will ensure he benefits from every gwin [channels that generate profits, either legally or illegally] (Interview, military analyst X1, April 2011).
These wealth-seeking, power-seeking officers reflected the socioeconomic conditions of the military, particularly the exploitative power relations and corruption within the military.

6.3.3. Exploitative Power Relations: Making Subservient Bodies, Muting Dissent

Another important dynamic of the Tatmadaw was the culture of internal violence taught in military training schools and practiced within the military. This culture reinforced the spirit of kogyi-nyilay (senior-junior) relations, which instilled complete loyalty and unquestioning obedience to senior members in the mindset tradition of “one blood, one voice, one order” (Thint, 2004; Oo, 2007; Myoe, 2009; Callahan 2005). Often times, senior officers’ violent actions were not reasonable, but they were not, or could not, be questioned. Two former DSA graduates from different intakes, both of whom had deserted from the army as captains, said senior cadets ordered their cohort of incoming cadets to line up only to be beaten on the stomach and the back for thirty minutes during the first week of their days at the DSA. As an extreme example, one cadet lost his life in 2004 (Interviews, 24 August 2011; 14 January 2012). As one moved up in the hierarchy, one enjoyed loyalty and obedience from juniors upon whom they enacted violence (Various Interviews, 2010-2011).

The violence in training schools for non-officers might have been more serious and deadly. Almost all my research participants who went to these schools recalled violence and death in the schools. The common experience of most interviewees was extreme poverty, forced labour and the endurance of physical violence. They were locked up and denied medical treatment. At night, they were forced to sleep naked to prevent desertion. Two or three of them were tied together if they wanted to use the washroom at night. Often times, loss of lives occurred due to malnutrition and physical violence. Various research participants recalled trainees suffering heart failure, eyesight loss, physical disability, mental disorder, and even suicide. They could not question or complain, as the rule was to follow orders and be obedient to senior members, even if the violence was unreasonable and unjustifiable. As such, since their early days in the military, the soldiers (many of them children) had already been exposed and accustomed to violence,
exploitation and various forms of injustice committed by seniors. Ko Oo’s experience illuminates the point:

[There was an incident] of two recruits who ran away. On their way, they killed a kid from the village and took his bicycle. But they got arrested later. The next day, the kid’s parents came to the school. The deserters lied at first, but the bike was the evidence. They admitted later that they left the kid’s body under a tree…. They were given the death sentence.

As soon as we graduated [after four months], we were sent to Papun district in the Karen state. On the way, the army truck behind us landed on a landmine… Stones went up and then fell on the soldiers. It was unbelievable. One trainee from the same batch, who looked very young, lost his leg…. When we saw him in the hospital, his mind was not stable anymore. He was screaming and calling everyone mom and dad…

When they [officers] drank, we had to stand near them…. we couldn’t sleep until they slept. They were just drunk and talked nonsense…. One night, Sayargyi [sergeant] U Soe Thein wanted to see me… As soon as he saw me, he asked ‘Is [the situation] good?’ His question didn’t have any introduction or anything, so I didn’t know what he meant. I asked him ‘Sayargyi, what do you mean?’ He just punched me right in my nose. He said ‘are you clear?’ I replied ‘I am not clear what you asked’. He punched me again. The captain interrupted and said ‘Sayargyi wanted to know about the security situation’. I responded that he should ask the question clearly like that. He punched me again, two, three times… and blood came out of my nose. After a few more punches, blood came out of my mouth too…. They said we were under training to be disciplined, but they were making themselves happy by making us cry. They were happy only when they saw soldiers’ tears (Interview, 20 April 2011).

These sufferings and traumatic experiences are not unusual in the military. Indeed, they are common in the military, especially during wartime, around the world. They highlight, however, that the boys were no strangers to death, violence and an atrocious environment.

Not only were new recruits subjected to violence, but also those at various other ranks. The rule all officers had to understand was: “control your own men by any means”. This was interpreted and practiced as total control over everyone under one’s command, whether the use of violence was justified or not. Clerk Sergeant Thant, who worked at the Military Intelligence headquarters in Yangon for nine years, told me:
On one Sunday, I was assigned as standby staff at the office. On that day, my senior officer Major xx (G2, General Staff Officer Grade 2) left the office early in the morning when he got an assignment. So another G2, Major xx who was supposed to check in at 9 am had to check in earlier…. He was a bit upset about it. I got to the office a few minutes late, which was not unusual. When I entered the office, he said ‘you were late’. Since it was a usual thing, I just relied ‘yes, sir. I am a little late’. He said ‘you are late, you guys don’t care about your duty’. As I looked at him with surprise and the sign language of ‘what’s new?’, he punched me right in the face until I totally collapsed … I was very upset because he treated me like an enemy… (Interview, 11 October 2011).

Highly uneven power relations sustained such violence and injustice. The military taught its members to be obedient to senior officers and to obey orders without question. Everyone understood their role as the ‘yes man’ to their seniors. As they moved up in the hierarchy, they in turn enacted violence on their juniors. Thus, officers and soldiers were accustomed to power relations as a Myanmar proverb indicates: ‘a htet phar aut phi’ (please the ones above, press the ones below). In short, the members of the military at all levels were made submissive and subservient through violence and injustice enacted by their relative seniors in the pretext of senior-junior relations in which a top-down command and control system mutes dissent. These extremely uneven power relations had material consequences in that senior officers were able to generate financial profits by exploiting juniors, with little or no justification for their actions and violence.

6.4. Corruption & Exploitation: Moving Wealth Upward

**Patron-Client Relations: Gift-Giving, Pleasing Seniors, Promotions**

One arena for the culture of pleasing the ones above was the gift-giving to senior officers to show loyalty. In the Burmese language, pleasing someone verbally or gift-giving in anticipation of something in return is called “phar”. The ability to phar senior officers by giving expensive gifts (sometimes via officers’ wives) was crucial in a junior’s career path so that one might be promoted to powerful positions or assigned to border areas where one could accrue profits from financially lucrative natural resource projects or illegal/legal cross-border trade. Htay Aung, an expert on Myanmar military affairs, outlined in detail the
truckload of gifts Brigadier General Win Myint (then commander of Light Infantry Division 77) brought for Senior General Than Shwe, as well as other officers, during a commanders’ quarterly meeting in 2005. The total value of the gifts was 1,215,000 kyat (US$ 1,215). Since the meeting was held three times a year, the annual cost was about US$ 3,500 to 4,000. This amount was notable because it was six to seven times the Brigadier General’s annual salary, (about US$ 600 a year). Win Myint was promoted to Commander of the Yangon Regional Military Command in 2008 (Aung, 2009). How his gift worked exactly is a different question, but he was promoted.

Division commanders and regional military commanders spent money for their seniors. For example, it was well known that during former Senior General Than Shwe family’s tours in the country, the commanders had to pay for whatever the Shwe family picked up at shops and malls. The cost of their selection of diamonds and jewelry was borne by the regional military commanders (Irrawaddy, 2011; Aung, 2009). When the wives of regional commanders went shopping, their husbands’ subordinates (battalion commanders) paid for the purchases.

Likewise, commanders at different levels phar their seniors to be recommended to training programs required for promotion. For example, commanding officers are required to attend Defense Services Command and the General Staff College for promotion. They need to attend the National Defense College before they can join the elite class of the military (Interview, Military analysis X1, 19 January 2012). While in school, they need to pay various expenses such as bribing school officers for good grades, or buying theses and so on.

Gift giving was needed not only for promotion, but also for protection. For instance, battalion commanders had to give expensive gifts to their seniors during military operation seasons in order for their battalions not to be sent to dangerous, conflict-ridden areas (Interview with a former captain, 11 October 2011). This gift culture went so far that one’s quality, apart from military abilities, was determined in terms of how loyal one was -- i.e. how much one could earn for his seniors ("Lut Pay" in Burmese) and how much he understood/cared for seniors ("Thi Tat" in Burmese) (various interviews 2010-2012).
Otherwise, he would be replaced with someone else who was more loyal and better understood the seniors.

Officers also needed to spend money on various people in exchange for favours for their families. This included bribing teachers to get into prestigious schools and graduate programs. For example, a daughter of General Maung Bo, the former Eastern Regional Commander who relocated Kham village (see Chapter 5), managed to enrol in a graduate program after offering a new sofa set to her teacher (Pers. Comm, a former teacher, 15 February 2012).

That practice of officers at various levels giving expensive gifts to their seniors raises the question of where that money came from. Investigating the pattern of exploitation gives an entry point to understand how officers extracted money from their juniors through the chain of command and how wealth moved upward. As mentioned earlier, the expansion of a battalion was not fully funded from the center. Instead, each battalion was required to raise its own funds. My research found that arbitrary taxation, forced labour and cheating in the context of battalion financial management enabled wealth to be extracted from poor soldiers and their families.

**Exploitation (1): Arbitrary Taxation**

In the past two decades, human rights NGOs have published various reports detailing the arbitrary taxation and forced labour enacted by the military against civilians (ND-Burma, 2010). Yet, there is little attention to the same problems faced by rank and file members of the military. One common phenomenon within battalion units has been the mandatory fees for various things that the military members did not even know about or keep track of. Some items for which army members were required to pay are:

- Bank savings
- Battalion Yanpongngwe (battalion fund)
- Library fees
- Fees to hire people for cleaning, farming etc. in the battalion (if they can’t do it themselves)
- Fees to buy maintenance materials (e.g. mops, house paint, garbage bags etc.)
• Dhamma Satkyar [Buddhist chanting] fees and donations for many religious events
• Independence day postcards and speech notes fee
• Monthly fee for the Mother and Children Association Fund
• Uniform fees for associations like Dhamma Satkyar group, Women’s Affairs
• Gifts for the wives of regional commanders or regiment commanders
• Funeral cost contributions
• Fund raising for veterans badges (Various Interviews 2010-2011)

Former captain Thura, who was a refugee in Thailand selling lottery tickets during my research, recalled his experience distributing salaries to soldiers in his company:

When we distributed pay, soldiers were eager to know how much they would get [usually they did not know how much had been deducted]. After deducting various fees, they were very disappointed because some got 100 kyat (US$ 0.10), some 500 kyat (US$ 0.50), some 1,000 kyat (US$ 1), with which they could not afford anything…. (Interview, 10 October 2011).

Ma Swe, the wife of Sergeant Zarni, who served in the army from 1986 to 2006, said when there were food fair events organized by the Women’s Association, each household had already been assigned their quota. Whether or not she took food, the fee got deducted from the husband’s salary anyway (Interview, 24 February, 2011). Former child soldier Ko Maung complained that soldiers were forced to contribute money to welcome events for the regional commander’s wife, even though they could not even have the leftover food from the events.

Depending on the army unit and personality of officers, particularly battalion commanders, there were many other ways soldiers’ salaries were reduced. Examples of actions causing deductions included going out of the army unit without permission or returning late, and not showing up on time for unpaid mandatory work, such as cleaning or maintenance work in the army unit. Waing, Lance Corporal Zayyar’s wife, said she was once refused Zayyar’s entire month’s salary as a punishment for her going outside the battalion unit without permission (Interview, 4 August 2011). Many interviewees revealed that when their wives worked outside the battalion unit, they were forced to contribute part of their income to the battalion fund.
Another measure took away a significant amount of a soldier’s salary. There was a savings program known as “bank su ngwe” (Bank Saving). A certain amount of money from each soldier’s salary was deducted for bank savings. The amount required for each soldier varied depending on the battalion unit. For example, Sgt. Maung was required to contribute 5,000 kyat (US$ 5) a month out of his total monthly salary of 34,400 kyat. Unmarried people from his rank were required to contribute 7,000 kyat and soldiers 5,000 kyat. In principle, soldiers could withdraw money for matters such as medical expenses for family members or for marriage. All my research respondents said they were not able to withdraw anything, and they did not know exactly how much money they had in savings.

**Exploitation (2): Unpaid Labour for Battalion Fund-Raising Projects**

There is a Burmese concept called “Lut Arr Pay”, which literally means “giving labour”. This concept has a sense of voluntarism in that people are supposed to contribute their labour for the wellbeing of their community. It is supposed to be voluntary community service. The Burmese military regime, however, exploited the concept, at least the name, to force people to work on various things including constructing roads, building houses for soldiers and officers, farming, and serving as military porters, mostly for the military/government, without any pay. Failure to comply could lead to fines, arrest and even torture and forced relocation.

This involuntary volunteer work was another important factor in understanding battalion fund-raising and corruption. Labour exploitation that financially benefited officers was more obvious in fund raising projects such as farming, livestock raising, charcoal making, and so on. In fact, initial start-up funds for these projects were provided by the Adjutant General’s Office when a battalion was established. In addition, each battalion got initial investment funds (ranging from 30 million to 100 million kyat depending on the unit). That is, the cost of labour and materials had already been included in the plan. Significant amounts of money disappeared, however, as the cash was dispersed to different units. The projects were then implemented by using the free labour of soldiers and their families. For example, if battalion chicken farming required making a fence, soldiers and their families were forced to collect bamboo and wood from the forest to make the fence. While the soldiers worked for free, the money to pay for their labour and materials went into to
officers' pockets. When the farming produced eggs and vegetables, families were forced to buy them, but the meagre profits, which were supposed to go to the tat welfare, went instead to the personal accounts of officers.

All participants in my research who attended military training schools agreed that they had to do more involuntary volunteer work than military training. According to Ko Oo, the former child soldier mentioned above:

For our unit, I had to carry charcoal, do farm work, go to the hills, cut bamboo... There was more work than military training [laugh]. We worked every day including a half day on Saturday. Sunday was off.... Most officers were rude; they swore and beat trainees all the time... Although we worked just like this, we didn’t get anything… They put everything [profits] into their pockets... (Interview, 26 April 2011).

Interview respondents agreed that there was little time for personal matters. They were obliged to work on different tasks one after another, as if they had been “sentenced to prison with hard labour rather than being soldiers” (Interview, 26 April 2011). In the name of Tat Fund raising, they were required to do anything and everything - from simple general tasks such as digging or cutting trees to sophisticated ones such as constructing new buildings or livestock farming, or brick and charcoal making.

In army units, it was not only soldiers but also their wives and families who had to provide unpaid, involuntary labour. Waing, the wife of a lance corporal from a communication battalion, recounted:

We had to cultivate rice for the army unit fund raising. They gave a pair of sarongs (Burmese traditional skirts) for men and women a year. But they didn’t give us any money for this project. No money for our labour either.... Even though they [officers] know we are in a difficult situation, they pretended to be blind... They never cared for us. Even when we borrowed money from company officers, we had to pay interest. They didn’t care whether or not we had food to eat; they just deducted everything at the end of the month.... When we were living in the army unit, we had to work from 7 am to 11 am, and then 1 pm to 5 pm. We repaired roads or cleaned out garbage or shrubs in the battalion unit. On Saturday, we had to do Dhamma Satkyar [Buddhist chanting]. It was very tiring, but we couldn’t defy orders as they said they would deduct from our salary if we didn’t do it. We had to wash and iron the clothes and longyis [Burmese traditional skirts] of our seniors’ wives too. They gave us only one or two bananas or candies… Sometimes, the division commander’s wife, as the women’s and welfare
association representative, came to give a speech. After that, we got a pack of rehydration power and two packs of mama [Thai instant noodles]. These were all we got for our labour… and they kept all the profits (Interview, 4 August 2011).

The wife of another soldier said:

If there were Buddhist chanting events for the safety of soldiers on the frontlines, it’s us who had to do all the work. We were told to pick flowers, buy this and that. We had to do all the necessary preparations. We had to use our own money, too. If we told them that the money they provided wasn’t enough to buy things for the events, they called us names and said it’s for your families and friends. Their wives said it’s an order and that they wanted everything done on time. We had to buy fresh meat and fish to feed Nats (spirits) for the safety of their husbands. They were afraid of their husbands being killed, but they ordered us to do the job for them as if we were their slaves (Interview, 9 September 2011).

Ma Swe, married to Sgt. Zarni since the late 1980s, said:

We could not go out of the army unit to make money because they (CSM – company sergeant major) wanted us to come and work whenever they wanted. If we were not around when they needed us, they blamed and punished us by forcing us to pick up litter, clean the grounds, cut bamboo, and so on. Their wives also blamed us. So, we had to be ready whenever they wanted us. Volunteer work never ended - two times a week, Saturday and Wednesday… If they ordered 100 bamboo culms per person, then we had to cut 100 bamboo culms from the forest. Sometimes, they said the husband has to bring 100 and the wife 100, so he [Zarni] had to get 200 bamboo culms [laughter]. We had to make fences for the farms….

(Interview, 24 February 2011).

In some battalions, soldiers and their families were required to participate in a tat fund-raising project known in Burmese as ‘sae myoe sae pin’ or “ten kinds ten plants” project. They had to participate in the project using their own labour and money. Whether or not the soldiers’ families wanted to participate in or benefit from the project did not matter; they were still forced to record in the books provided that the project benefited them. During investigations from higher-level authorities, soldiers and their families were forced to report only good results, even though these unproductive projects had taken much of their labour time and money, whereas working elsewhere would have generated income for their families.
Exploitation (3): Unpaid labour for officers, their wives, and others

People were not only forced to work for Tat Fund Raising, but also to do domestic work for officers. A child soldier reported that he had to work like a ‘slave’ at a sergeant’s home: “[I] ate what they fed me, did what they said… I was busy doing one thing after another. There was no free time”. Similarly, all women who participated in my research said they all had to do domestic work at their seniors’ houses, not only for the officers but also for their wives and children, including laundry, cooking, cleaning house, and babysitting. In the same way that soldiers understood that their seniors could use violence as punishment with little constraint or justification, soldiers’ wives also understood that disobeying the officers’ wives would either prevent their husbands from being promoted, or send them to dangerous and conflict-ridden areas. Even when they knew that the actions and demands of officers and their wives were personal and unjust, they restrained their reactions against them (Various interviews, 2010-2011).

Clerks in offices were referred to as ‘a nee pyar’, meaning personal assistants, who were always busy with various tasks and constantly under pressure to please and fulfill the officer’s wishes. Thant, the clerk Sgt. at the Military Intelligence (MI) headquarter, said:

Throughout my nine years at the MI headquarters, I was always busy, but nothing for my own behalf. I couldn’t even see my dad before he died…. If there was a task, it was urgent and important. I was like… “Yes, sir. It’s almost finished, sir. Just a moment, sir. The paper is coming out now from the printer, sir”. What was it? It was the dinner menu for the delegations from China and North Korea (Interview, 11 October 2011).

Thant continued:

Even when we received a pair of shoes for Daw Kyain Kyain [Gen. Than Shwe’s wife] from an ambassador or from her relatives abroad, it was like fire for us [laughter]. We were busy taking care of it. Matters were all important and urgent.

Apart from tat fund raising, the wives were required to attend training and sports games. Ma Swe recalled her experiences related to training and sports games in the tat for two decades:
There were training sessions to attend all the time too, about once in every three months. It depended on the kind of training; some training took 45 days to two months. We had to attend training so that we could take care of the security of the battalion once our husbands were on the frontline. The training sessions were like military training. We had to be on time, 8:30 AM for example. If late, we were punished (picking up litter or running around the field). At 12 pm, we took a break. We had to rush back home, cook and come back to the training. One lunchtime, I fought with him [Sgt. Zarni] because I had only boiled beans to eat when I came home tired [laughter] (Interview, 24 February 2011).

In addition, the wives were required to compete in sports. Ma Swe, recalled:

There were also sport games we had to compete in. If we ended up having to go up to the final in May Myo [Pyin Oo Lwin], then it took time. We just had to do it, didn’t matter whether we were willing or not. How could we be willing to do it when we were more concerned with our kids back home? We were worried how to feed ourselves when we got back. They just unilaterally got us to do things without caring if our family was OK or not (Interview, 24 February, 2011).

**Exploitation (4): Cheating, Stealing**

There were also instances of corruption and fraud in which soldiers – and even mid-level officers – lost their money to senior officers. Major Wai from the artillery division complained, for example, of not getting his daily support of 300 kyat. In his tat, the commanding officer’s wife handled money matters, such as salary payment to officers; keeping mid-level officers’ savings; receiving gifts from those who needed her husband’s approval for businesses or promotion, and so on. Every time Major Wai went to see her to get his money, he received ill treatment, such as blaming him for coming to ask for money, or coming to bother her while she was busy. He could not remember the exact amount, but he lost tens of thousands of kyat to her (Interview, 23 May 2011).

There was also stealing in the military, in that officers in charge of supporting units sold elsewhere the food, rice rations, oil, and gasoline that was supposed to go to the unit. For instance, the army was supposed to provide these food rations for soldiers, but the quality of the food actually provided to soldiers was poor. Kyaw Kyaw, a soldier, recalled his experiences:
Food [provided by the army kitchen] was really bad. Even cats didn’t want to eat the fish they fed us. The rice was bad too. It got digested quickly. Bean soup was not soup; it was water. Because of this bad rice with inedible curry, we just bought ready-made fried fish or dried beans or other snacks from Sergeant Aung Kyaw Moe’s shop on credit…. At the end of the month, all or most of my salary went to Aung Kyaw Moe’s shop (15 August 2011).

Sergeant Zarni explained that in his battalion, officers in charge of the supporting unit intentionally bought the worst kind of foodstuff for the unit, and exchanged the battalion unit’s good quality rations, such as condensed milk, with cheaper foodstuffs. The balance resulting from this exchange went into his pocket, his seniors’ pockets and the battalion unit fund (Interview, 24 February 2011).

The presence of harsh power relations and exploitation in terms of taxation and forced labour raise the question of the soldiers’ agency and subjectivity. It is important to recognize that soldiers (and their wives) were not simply victims and passive recipients. It was not that they did not act against injustice. Ma Swe, for example, refused to do laundry for an officer’s wife whose husband just recently arrived in the army unit. Waing managed to live outside the army unit to avoid further involuntary labor. Ko Maung, the child soldier, talked back to his Sayargyi. In extreme cases, there were reports of officers and soldiers giving false reports to their seniors about insurgency group movements so that they did not have to chase them (Various interviews, 2010-2011).

There were, however strong systemic limitations on reactions against seniors’ orders and personal demands. The culture of complete obedience to seniors had been reinforced in the military to the extent that juniors were supposed to obey their seniors not only during their time on duty, but also in everyday, off-duty interactions. That is, a top-down command and control system and ‘one blood, one voice, one order’ tradition had become personalized to such an extent that a senior’s power and authority, endorsed for military tasks, worked similarly in everyday affairs. For instance, lieutenant Htet recalled that once when the division commander’s daughter wanted a motorcycle, the instruction to the soldiers came with the exact model number, colour and so on. Htet was given 1,000,000 kyat (US$ 1,000), but the actual cost was US$ 1,400. Since he did not have the right to question his seniors (in this case ask for more money), the needed US$ 400 was made available by altering the battalion fund account. This reflects a well-known military
discourse: “I don’t want the bottle leaking, I just want water” (Radio Free Asia interview with former Commander in Chief, Tin Oo, 29 January 2011). In this case, Ye Htet just had to buy the motorbike by finding US$ 400 by his own means: cheating his fellows in his military unit.

### 6.5. Military Exploitation: Enriching Capitalist Generals and Impoverishing Soldiers

The authoritarian relations between seniors and juniors in which dissent was impossible, and violence and exploitation went unquestioned, created exploitative relations among generals’ families and foot soldiers. The senior officers enriched themselves and the foot soldiers got chronically impoverished in a politico-military context in which the generals’ stated mission for military expansion in the name of nation-state building was to control resource-rich borderland territories for capitalist resource extraction. The generals would be the ones who benefited from capitalist expansion.

In July 2006, the wedding video footage of Senior-General Than Shwe’s youngest daughter, Thandar Shwe, leaked to the public. The video known as Sein Si Thaw Nya [the night of diamonds] outraged the public, as Thandar Shwe appeared wearing layers of millions of dollars worth of diamonds and jewelry. Late Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuen Yew commented that she “was like a Christmas tree” (Global Viewpoint, 2007). Top military leaders, their families and cronies as well as foreign investors attended the wedding, in which the couple received wedding gifts worth US $50 million, including diamonds, jewelry, cars and houses. Prior to and after the event, the price of diamonds went up (The Irrawaddy, 2006). Given that the culture of gifting diamonds to senior military members was collateral for business favours or promotion to higher positions, officers, relatives and friends often gave diamonds as gifts.

Over the past decade, the Shwe family had accumulated a significant amount of wealth by monopolizing the country’s economy. They bought the most expensive real estate areas in Yangon, Nay Pyi Daw and other cities. Their investments included hospitals, hotels and tourism, oil and gas, and the gem and timber sectors directly or indirectly through their cronies Tayza (Htoo company) and Zaw Zaw (Max Myanmar).
Moreover, Than Shwe’s subordinates and their families had to give portions of their incomes from every project to the Shwe family as gifts in order to keep their lucrative businesses and opportunities.

The Shwe family was not alone; their immediate subordinates and their juniors had also monopolized the country’s economy as their family affairs. For example, the former second most powerful army man, General Maung Aye, through businessman Aung Ko Win, was involved in banking, aviation, gem mining, construction, and logistics businesses. His adopted daughter, wife of Major Pyi Aung (son of late Minister of Industry (1) Aung Thaung), was involved in hotels and tourism, banking, and oil and gas businesses through her brother-in-law’s company, International Group of Entrepreneurs (IGE). Shwe Mann, house speaker during this research, through his son’s Iyar Shwe Wah company, was involved in the export/import of rice, cooking oil, fertilizer, agricultural equipment, as well as gold and gem mining, timber, sea products, tourism, and internet and FM radio businesses. Tin Aung Myint Oo, the vice president, was involved in construction, real estate, the export/import of automobiles, and gas and gem exploration (see The Irrawaddy, 2011; Aung, 2009; Min, 2004). While it is not known how much these families owned exactly, their monopoly of the country’s economy meant the entire economy was in their hands, as the private email of Htet Tayza, a 19 year-old son of crony Tayza, indicated:

[The] US bans us? haha. We're still [f…ing] cool in singapore. See my photos? We're sitting on the whole burmese GDP. We've got timber, gems, gas to be sold out other countries like singapore, china, india and russia. Last month, people took out to the streets for protest against little fuel price hike, you know what, that's silly stuff to me. I used to fly back once a week [from Singapore to Myanmar], and my bro is rocking on his red brand new Lamborghini Gallardo with hot sexy western chicks. Come on, fly with Bagan [Air Bagan, his father’s airline]. It's cheaper than others, right? 1S$ makes a lot differences in burmese currency. And I need another Ferrari to rock on :P (Original email, received from Listserv, 8888laorganizer on yahoogroup, 26 October 2007, message # 350)46

46 The original message was in English. The brother of the writer denies the authenticity of this email. Diplomatic communities debate its authenticity but they agree that Tayza is one of the richest businessmen in Myanmar.
The wealth of these oligarchic capitalist families sharply contrasted with many thousands of soldiers’ families, such as that of Sergeant Zarni, who served in the army from 1986 to 2006, only to be impoverished. As Zarni was on the frontline most of the time, his wife Ma Swe took the lead for the family’s welfare. Ma Swe worked as a construction worker, and sold bamboo shoots and vegetables collected in the forest. She also sold noodles if there were special occasions. Due to mandatory unpaid involuntary labour for the military (discussed above), she could not work enough to earn an income for the family. In addition, people like the company sergeant major (CSM) or the company quartermaster (CQ) often banned her from selling in crowded places where their wives also sold similar goods. One time, she was slapped in the face by a CSM for raising questions over the ban.

Since her income was not enough for six family members (excluding Zarni), their 13 year-old son dropped out of school and worked at a restaurant for 7,000 kyat (US$ 7) a month so that the family could send four other children to school. Often times, the family had no money at all and there were times the children had nothing to eat. Borrowing money with 20% monthly interest was a way to solve immediate financial needs, but it kept Ma Swe in the debt loop as she borrowed money from one lender to pay another (Interviews, 2010-2011). Poverty such as this led the wives of some soldiers to earn money as clandestine sex workers. According to Zarni, there were 18 women in his army unit who were working as sex workers, and there were more women whom he suspected to be working as sex workers (Various interviews, 2011-2012).

The poverty of frontlines soldiers was even worse. For soldiers on the frontline, starvation was a common problem. According to former Corporal Naing:

On the radio, our officers kept giving orders to move our platoon from one location to another. They kept telling go here, go there. We couldn’t get back to our camp [sometimes for weeks], and we did not have enough food rations. Most of the time, we were starving. We just ate whatever plants we could grab as we patrolled…. We also shot whatever animals we found roaming in the forest or in villages. On top of starvation and many troubles in the forest, enemies came out of nowhere. They sometimes shot at us and ran away. On the one hand, we were tasked with difficult tasks; on the other hand, we were starving (Interview, 22 February 2011).
Captain Soe, who was deployed in eastern Shan State in 1996, said the military spent about 7 kyat a day per person when a cup of tea cost 15 kyat. In principle, a frontline soldier was entitled to 16 tins of rice, 4 cans of condensed milk, 1 bottle of oil, as well as enough rice, salt, army rum and necessary supplies per month. According to a military analyst, the army units had an adequate budget and support materials to take care of soldiers on the frontlines. Theoretically, frontline units were provided enough resources by military headquarters, but materials disappeared somewhere – either due to corruption or waste during transportation (Interviews, military analyst X1; Lieut. Major Htet, 23 May 2011). All of my interviewees admitted that what they received was not enough even to sustain a daily minimum food intake. If received, the quality of the food was bad. Worse, a common experience was that the rations did not come at all. Starving soldiers were left to extend one day of rations to three days, or even up to 2-3 weeks (Various Interviews, Sgt. Zarni, Lieut. Kai, and Captain Soe, Corporal Zayar, 2010-2011).

6.6. Offloading Class Exploitation

The poverty of these soldiers offers some explanation as to why soldiers solved their own poverty by further exploiting civilians – the weaker ones without guns. Before discussing soldiers’ actions, it is worth repeating briefly the civilians’ experiences of violence illustrated in Chapter 5. People in eastern Myanmar had experienced the soldiers not only physically abusing villagers but also looting their property including paddy, rice, cows, pigs, and crops.

When I asked Lance Corporal Zayar about extortion of foodstuffs from villagers, he admitted that:

The main problem was that our food rations did not come from our military unit. We nagged a village head to give us rice, chickens, pigs and so on. We threatened to relocate his village if he couldn’t give what we wanted (Interview, 22 February 2011).

The situation was even worse for those who were deployed in places far away from villages, where they were left with literally nothing. They tried to survive on whatever they could find. When I asked Captain Soe about this issue, he responded that there were
times his company had to eat grass. As they approached a village, they took whatever they saw: curry, rice, vegetables, chillies, onions, clothes, and so on.

Since I am an officer, I know they [soldiers] got food from the villagers [without permission]. Often times, I didn’t say anything. It’s OK if they are happy [since Capt. Soe cannot solve the problem either]. If they said, ‘captain, this is for you’, then I just ate [laughter]. Eh? What can I do? Really, there is nothing to eat. We couldn’t stand it any longer. There were only the same old rice and boiled stems of banana trees. So, these kids grabbed one thing here and one thing there. When I asked ‘hey guy, what’s that?’, they brought boiled maize mixed with cooking oil. Then I ate with such happiness [clap]. Really, there was nothing (Interview, 12 October 2010).

Most research participants admitted that they rarely asked for food. Instead, they used force to get what they wanted. The reasons they used force varied. Some soldiers, ordered by their seniors to get food, worried that a soft tone would not yield what their officers wanted. In order to avoid physical punishment from their officers, they used force in the first place to ensure that they fulfilled the order. Some were embarrassed for having to beg from villagers. According to Zayar, “We are not beggars. We cannot go to the village with poor-looking face and beg for things. I know it’s bad for the villagers… I told them that I was taking this and that. Sometimes, I took what I needed without letting the owners know. This was even better because I didn’t have to face them” (Interview, 24 February 2011).

In some areas, army units assigned to each village the amount of money and foodstuff to provide to the tat monthly. In some areas, officers and soldiers arbitrarily demanded things depending on the need. Such extortion turned more violent when soldiers’ hunger was exacerbated by the tiring and life-threatening patrol activities on the frontlines, where unfamiliar people in obscure territories were considered a source of danger. In other words, since these soldiers had recently arrived in these areas for a few months of military operations, they not only lacked an understanding of local conditions, but also lacked any established relationships with the villagers. They turned the villages into support units (both labour and material support). Lance Corporal Zayar, for example, said:
Many people ran away, even the entire village left, because they were not happy with us. We said, “if you don’t give us what we want, such as pigs, chickens, and rice, we will set your village on fire”. They were afraid and ran away. There are many stories like this…. In some villages, the entire village was already empty before we arrived. We killed and ate their pigs and buffalos, which were roaming around in the village or in the forest…. Well, they [the villagers] were not happy when they had to give us stuff, but they gave it to us since they are afraid of our guns, right? (Interview, 14 February 2011)

Back in the battalion unit, villagers faced not only the extractions from poor soldiers, but also from soldiers’ families. Various Shan research participants responded that the soldiers’ children stole things from their homes and grocery shops, while their wives cheated villagers in selling and buying things. While it is true that the cheating happened, there were instances in which the language barrier between Burmese-speaking soldier families and Shan-speaking villagers led to confusion and misunderstanding. In any case, exploitation happened.

The same processes and experience applied to the issue of forced labour. In poorly-funded battalion units, the labour needed for tat fund-raising or tat maintenance activities utilized the free labour of villagers, while labour fees (which appeared on financial documents) were not used to pay for the labour (but went instead to officers’ pockets). Villagers might be forced to do tat fund raising or maintenance/security activities and to carry military equipment as porters. Treatment of villagers varied depending on the culture of the tat officers and soldiers. As an extreme example, a private mentioned witnessing one villager being shot dead for sickness, and in another case, an old man was left alone in the forest when serving as a military porter. Given that villages were subject to multiple army units, depending on the territory, they were required to provide unpaid labour all the time to different units. As a result, villagers ran away every time government soldiers came to the village.

Exploitative relations: Pleasing Those Above, Pressing Below

The relations between the army and the villagers raise an important question: why would these soldiers, who were also poor, exploited and oppressed, enact violence on villagers they were supposed to protect? A good example might be the story of Aung, a
soldier whose father was a lance corporal before retiring from the army due to a mental disorder. As an elder son of a poor family, Aung dropped out of school early to support his family. Suffering abuse at work while he could not help his family, he joined the military as an alternative. Once he was on the frontline, his poverty and personality were caught up with his subscription to military ideology and practices. Regardless of his Karen-Shan ethnic heritage, he believed that people in the area in the Shan State where his army unit was deployed were rebel supporters or sympathizers, and that every possible action against enemies needed to be taken before the enemies took the lives of soldiers, including his own (Interviews, 29 October 2011). The legitimating discourse for violence in these areas was one of the 60 behavioural codes of soldiers: “enemies must be treated like sun and fire” (Ministry of Defense, n.d.).

In fact, these types of discourse and practice were supposed to be exercised only in times of war or during military operations, but they had been utilized in the military for everything, even for the personal profit of officers. In this thinking, the practice of ordering villagers to get bamboo culms for Tat Fund raising was the same as ‘clearing’ insurgents: ask no question or clarification - just do what the officers order. This was known in the military as “I don’t want the bottle leaking, I just want water” (Radio Free Asia Interview with Former Commander-in-Chief, Tin Oo, 29 January 2011). If the officer ordered soldiers to get foodstuff or labour from the villagers, soldiers got the job done by any means necessary. Officers’ authority and ability to act violently against their juniors without justification played out tellingly in that the drunken officer’s un/semi-conscious words to ‘give these villagers a lesson’ led soldiers to actually beat up the villagers. The soldiers might avoid the officer’s punches by beating up the villagers instead of taking the order as drunken words (Interview, 11 October, 2010).

Not being able to fulfill the order, either for military duty or officers’ personal demands, could lead to harsh physical punishment. Soldiers implemented orders without questioning or using their own judgment. In this light, Aung’s fulfillment of his duty, his take on villagers, and the need to deal with his own poverty entailed extortion of villagers. This does not mean, though, that Aung liked the military. While he was doing what a soldier should do, he disliked the exploitation and inequality in the army, and the abuses against his homosexuality in the military (Interview, 29 October 2011; diary given to me).
Extreme forms of violence such as mass murders, arbitrary killings, torture, and setting villages on fire took place in a similar way. According to Captain Soe, once an order was given to “clear this area of enemies”, the order went downward along the chain of command without any clarification, or asking upward on how to proceed. Field officers might be in a dilemma over how much force to use and whether “clear” meant “kill” or relocate villagers. If the handling was not effective, and lost the lives of government soldiers and their weapons to ambushes, the field officers could face harsh punishment from senior officers, or investigation, trial, and demotion. The situation was more complicated when the orders kept coming from above to poor/starving soldiers, and the soldiers could not solicit information from villagers about insurgency members, or where to expect ambush or landmines.

6.7. Conclusion

The preceding discussion examined the nature of social relations in the army: extremely uneven, top-down power relations in which seniors could exploit and enact violence on juniors, while the juniors’ ability to hold the seniors accountable was highly limited or impossible. This chapter also highlighted the sources of soldiers’ poverty: arbitrary taxation and involuntary labour that depleted financial resources, as well as hampered the ability to earn an income to support themselves and their families. This chapter also illuminates that the poverty of soldiers and their families is a class process in that military officers exploited the mass of rank and file of soldiers (and their families) for the sake of their own upward mobility. For officers, the practice of military self-funding provided a stepping-stone for their own upward mobility in the competitive echelon of the military. They accumulated wealth for themselves as well as mobilized resources needed to phar their seniors by giving gifts. Exploitation of rank and file soldiers and their families in the process of Tat financial management was the channel through which wealth was sucked up from the bottom of the hierarchy and eventually reached the top.

The military expansion in Myanmar in the name of counterinsurgency or nation-state building manufactured the poverty of soldiers and their families. Studying the socio-economic livelihood of Myanmar government soldiers at the micro-level shows that the soldiers’ violence against civilians, that supposedly appears to be part of the state aim for
building the nation and protecting its sovereignty, was in fact to mitigate their own poverty, and to counter the exploitation and oppression they faced within the military by offloading their burden onto civilians. Seen in this light, violence and poverty are not linked together in any simple way. Indeed, violence is a matter of socio-economic relations in which some are empowered and enriched, while some are improverished and disempowered. It is a story of harsh power relations, exploitation and corruption as much as it is about physical violence. It is also a story of systemic harsh exploitation from top to bottom, an extreme form of patron-client relations in the context of a totalitarian military regime and capitalist resource exploitation. This story is also about the bottom echelons in the economic development promoted by the GMS, which will be discussed further in the next chapters.
PART III: DEVELOPMENT & VIOLENCE

Introduction

The three preceding chapters have demonstrated that violence in Myanmar is a historically contingent struggle between the state and indigenous groups for territories and sites of resources. The chapters showed that violence is much more than a result of poverty, and that understanding violence requires looking at complex multiple processes at different sites, scales and times. Chapter 4 illustrated the long struggle over land through discourses and practices of nation, sovereignty, and ancestral land. Chapter 5 illustrated that the violent conflicts over land and resources created “conditions for displacement” – i.e. destroying livelihood bases and thus forcing villagers to migrate to Thailand. Poverty did not readily translate into villagers joining insurgent groups to prolong violent conflict. Quite the contrary, it is protracted conflict that has impoverished people, forcing them to flee to Thailand. Chapter 6 turned to a micro-level socioeconomic study of
violence by exploring the livelihood experiences of Myanmar government soldiers. It highlighted that the institutional dynamics of class exploitation impoverished soldiers (and their families) to the extent that they were forced to act violently against civilians for their own survival. These three chapters, studying violence at both macro and micro levels through experiences of villagers and government soldiers demonstrated that poverty does not adequately explain the cause of violence.

If poverty does not explain violence, what do poverty reduction efforts do to the business of addressing violence? This question is the focus of the remaining chapters in this dissertation. The purpose though is not to investigate whether or not development can, or to what extent does reduce or prevent conflict, but to investigate the ‘location’ of development in violent conflicts by situating development in the context of Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) regionalization. The chapters in Part III explore the broad development discourses and practices at the GMS regional level. Chapter 7 illustrates how the nature of the GMS, and thinking about development, conflict and politics resemble the ways Myanmar thinks and enacts development for the purpose of claiming territories. Chapter 8 looks at the way violence at the Tasang hydropower project is involved with the GMS. Chapter 9 investigates the way the GMS interacts with the governance of displaced Shan people in Thailand.
Chapter 7.  GMS As A Violent Political Project: A Region Seeing Like A State

7.1. Introduction

The primary aim of the GMS, according to the ADB, is to "help strengthen the economic and social well-being of the peoples in the subregion through regional cooperation initiatives" (ADB, 1999: 1) and to help "the poor the most" (ADB, 2009:7). It is "a natural economic area bound together by the Mekong River, covering 2.6 million square kilometers and a combined population of around 326 million" (ADB, 2012; emphasis added). The GMS is often portrayed as having promoted “Peace in the subregion [that] has encouraged the natural process of economic integration” (ADB, 1999), and that the Bank has served as an “honest broker” of the GMS by avoiding conflicts and focusing on economic growth (Bryant, 2005:6). This chapter examines the discourses and practices of the GMS by asking the question: if the GMS is a development program that is supposed to avoid conflict and focus on economic growth, how is it related to people such as the Shan who have been dispossessed and impoverished by political violence?

The broad argument of this chapter is that the ADB interacts with the forces of violence in very complex ways. The “discursive formation” (Peet & Watts, 2004:232) of the GMS as a new domain for development intervention itself is problematic in the first place. GMS formation has not only resembled the process of nation-state building in terms of spatial imagination and often violent reconfiguration of the regime of property relations, but has also deepened individual states’ violent control over previously unreached territories and people. This makes the GMS a political project under the guise of “development”, and not simply an “economic” region that has “naturally” evolved.

Three particular arguments highlighted in the sections that follow are, first, the process of GMS spatial reorganization is similar to the process of colonialism under the guise of “development”. It involves claiming territories and bureaucratization of resource management, replacing local people’s self-determination over resources with the decision-making power of outsiders, especially the national states. In particular, this
The colonial process of the GMS both mimics and deepens the process of a national state’s sovereign claims in terms of:

- Spatial construction of the GMS as a shared space that belongs to all;
- Transformation of locally-appropriated and nationally-bounded resources into the region’s common property, no longer limited to those who depend on the riparian resources, live on them, and work with them;
- Deepening local resource users’ loss of self-determination over resources to state officials, unelected bureaucrats and technocrats from afar, whose immediate survival is not dependent on the resources they claim to own and/or manage.

Second, development launched at the regional level resonates with the way national states use development as a mechanism for asserting control over indigenous territories.

Third, using nation-states as a set of jigsaw puzzle pieces or mosaic building blocks of the region means supporting, in turn, the states in firming up their contours of control. Just as the GMS works through the nation-states by ensuring ‘country ownership’, member nation-states also find the GMS useful in their attempts to claim territories they previously could not reach. The GSM, through the states, can “free up” locally-accessed and managed resources for outside exploitation; the states, through GMS cooperation, can extend their control over hitherto unreached territories within their national boundaries. As Nancy Peluso points out in the context of conservation, states appropriate international concerns “as a means of eliciting support for their own control over productive natural resources… often by using violence” (Peluso, 1993:199).

The chapter proceeds as follows. Section 7.2 traces the long colonial origin of the GMS, focusing particularly on the French and British rivalry in Indochina in the 19th century. Section 7.3 examines the nature of the discursive construction of the GMS, unsettling the ADB’s discourses of the GMS as a natural region. It highlights that the GMS is an arbitrary and political construction. Section 7.4. looks at the way the construction of the GMS resembles nation-state building. It particularly highlights the spatial imagination of the region and reconfiguration of property relations that deepen local resource users’ loss of self-determination over resources to outsiders, especially state actors. It also sheds light on the ADB culture of avoiding conflicts and prioritizing infrastructure projects, both
of which facilitate the deepening of local people’s loss of resource rights. Section 7.5 explores the ADB’s almost accidental focus on poverty reduction and more deliberate focus on transportation links, which are in line with Burmese state interests. Section 7.6 discusses the similarities between the GMS and the Myanmar state in terms of using development as a mechanism to claim lands and resources. It shows that the GMS and Myanmar are in sync with each other and that the modes of thinking and acting about development are the same. The GMS, therefore, is a convenient regional platform for the Burmese authoritarian state in appropriating development as a counterinsurgency tool.

7.2. Colonial Origins of the GMS

Pholsena and Banomyong assert that “the origin of this [the GMS] geographic economic idea is difficult to determine” (2006:118). It can be traced back, however, to time even earlier than the 19th century colonial period. Milton Osborne (Osborne, 2006), for example, shows that trade and navigation along the Mekong River had already existed in the 19th century in what was known as Indochina as well as Sipsongpanna, between Laos and Burma and along the Thai border. A major French expedition team began in 1886 from Saigon hoping to reach Yunnan by navigating along the river. While recorded history shows Europeans exploring the river since the mid 1500s, the 19th century expedition of the French survey team marked the first major European exploration of the river (Evans, 2002; Miles, 2014; Osborne, 2006).

The navigation missions, combined with a civilizing purpose, went hand in hand with commercial activities. Sachchidanand Sahai traced the history of French Mekong expeditions in the Mekong that hoped to “open up” China for mining and trade (Sahai, 2005). Of course, river trade and market activities among river communities existed long before the European domination of Indochina (Glassman, 2010; Hill, 1998; Osborne, 2006; Walker, 1999). Although the riparian communities did not expect river trade to extend to China, the volume of trade was not insignificant. As various authors point out, communities relied on trade for much of what the needed. Yet the extent of that earlier trade was not legible to the Europeans, as there were no records of local trade (Mayoury and Pheuiphanh, 2002). Neither were the French able to attain much local information, due both to communication barriers and their own mindset of superiority. They navigated,
surveyed, and explored the river to trade with China, and to gain control over riparian resources and polities (Osborne, 2006; Walker, 1999; Hill, 1998). Since the very beginning of the French colonial period on the continent, the French believed in the political and commercial potential of mastering the river, although they realized this would be difficult (Osborne, 2006; Sahai, 2005). The French asserted that being able to master the Mekong would enable them to dominate the subcontinent. In a sense, the Mekong was the principal geographic basis of the French colonial regime in the region, while river transportation – just as the GMS focus on transportation links (discussed below) – was a critical means to access, trade and dominate the subcontinent.

The French expedition was not only for trade, but also a competitive move in the rivalry between the British and French colonial regimes in Indochina. In the late 19th century, the British had already established control in South Asia, Burma, Malaya and in some Chinese ports. Shanghai and Singapore, under the British, were already commercially successful. The French wanted to turn Saigon into a commercial center like Shanghai. They also sought to access China through the Mekong, to maintain their protectorates in Laos and Cambodia, and to link them with Cochinchina. For all these goals, they saw control over the Mekong as crucial (Nguyen, 1999:27). The French aggressive expansion along the Mekong River, which flows not only through Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, but also through Siam (under British influence) and the Shan State (under British Burma), created a confrontation between the two colonial powers. However, an agreement was made between the two in 1898, recognizing the Mekong River valley as under French tutelage, the Menam (Chao Phraya) watershed as independent, and Siam as a buffer zone. (Siam earlier had already given up the east bank of the Mekong to the French to make the river the demarcation line between French Indochina and Siam) (Nguyen,1999; Winichakul, 1994). It should be noted, however, that colonial rivalry was not new with the arrival of Europeans. Siam and Vietnam, for example, had been competing over and ransacking Mekong principalities and Lao kingdoms such as Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and others prior to the European rivalry in the early 19th century (Nguyen, 1999:21). This history reveals that accessing and controlling the Mekong is not new with the GMS, but has had a long colonial history. The pattern continues in the 20th and 21st centuries.
In the 20th century, the Mekong region hosted wars and revolutions. Colonial exploitation, violence of new modern nation-state formations and the surge of nationalist movements against colonial regimes in the region characterized the first half of the century (Nguyen, 1999). During the Second World War, Japan invaded Indochina, displacing British and French colonial powers. Indochinese wars were fought from the late 1940s to the 1980s among Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, the USA, France and China. Anti-colonial battles, communist movements and bloody anti-communist campaigns characterized Indochina during the second half the 20th century (Smith, 2012). In addition, inter and intra-state conflicts plagued the region.

Economically, in the mid 20th century in the era of American “globalism” (Smith, 2002), when the US emerged as a global player replacing old colonial regimes, the US also replaced the Euro-centric civilizing mission with American cultural supremacy and a capitalist market economy (Evans, 2002:44). To counter competing communist regimes and ideologies in Indochina in the Cold War context, the US sponsored its allies - Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam - to form the Mekong Committee in 1957, at the initiative of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Far East (ECAFE). Wong (2010) indicates that the main task of the committee shifted from initial river management and flood control to industrialization and socio-economic development in the 1960s to produce the region as a development space. Development initiatives under the US were the “second moment of objectification of the Mekong river… creating the ‘region’ by the expansion of the notion of the Mekong as a single thread of navigability to the Chinese frontier to a bounded ‘region’ for production and development, one that makes it possible for us to speak of the Mekong region today” (Wong, 2010: 46; see Ch.2 for details of the creation of the region in the 1940s-1960s). Attempting to protect Indochina from the communists, the US supported ‘development’ in the region. The main aim, however, was ‘political’ in that it was to shore up those Indochina regimes in support of the US-led capitalist bloc in Cold War. In a sense, it aimed at “political rapprochement through economic cooperation” (Dosch & Hensengerth, 2005). Due to domestic upheavals and intraregional military conflicts, the Mekong Committee was not able to pursue its agenda. In the early 1990s, it was re-organized as the Mekong River Commission responsible for sustainable development of the Mekong Basin.
In terms of recent history, although the GMS emerged in 1992 as a formal grouping (without any legal binding) with the support of the ADB, the GMS in its contemporary form had its roots in the 1980s when Thailand experienced an economic boom and then, a decade later, an overheated economy (Glassman 2010; Medhi 2004; Oehlers 2006; Hirsch 2001). Most significant is a notion from Thai Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan (1988-1991), whose motto to turn the Mekong region from a ‘battlefield into a marketplace’, encouraged Thai businesses to compete for natural resource access in neighbouring countries. This was also a time when Thailand’s economy was overheated and its forests were disappearing (Glassman, 2010; Hirsch, 2001). Thailand’s neighbours, such as Laos, Burma and Cambodia, became sources of cheap labour and natural resources. This trend was reinforced when the ADB began to give institutional support through the GMS framework in 1992. As such, “the projected ‘Greater Mekong Subregion’ is still conceived on a colonial regime designed-grid, only supplanting but not obliterating the grand vision of the ‘French Indochina’ construct” (Malay, 2006: 19).

Subregionalization under the GMS, therefore, is a “historically contingent process” (Pred, 1984). What is new is how the discourse of development based on market capitalism gets situated in a new geographic domain, cast at a transnational spatial scale but still based on nation-states as building blocks of the region. Unlike the previous colonial era, however, new actors across the globe have been involved in this process, providing financial resources and technical assistance in the place of gunboat diplomacy.

7.3. “Natural” Region vs. Arbitrary Construction: What’s in a name?

This new domain of development has been created by very specific discourses, particularly the naturalizing discourse (Glassman, 2010). According to the Asian Development Bank, “The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) is a natural economic area bound together by the Mekong River, covering 2.6 million square kilometers and a combined population of around 326 million” (ADB, 2012; emphasis added). Similarly, the Bank defines Economic Corridors, spatial concentration areas of the GMS, as “natural economic corridors” (ADB, 2010), while portraying integration in the region as "the natural process of economic integration" (ADB, 1999, 2000, also cited in Glassman, 2010).
Naming it as a region and calling it a ‘natural’ area raise serious analytical questions. Why is it ‘Greater’, and what regions it is a subset of? How does ‘Greater’ relate to ‘Sub’? The description of the GMS as 'sub' is not accurate in the first place – at least in way the ADB portrays the subregion as if it is were a geographic container in which resources and benefits of trade could be equally shared among members. The actual unfolding of the GMS shows that sub-regionalization of the GMS was indeed global from the outset. Since the early period, the GMS involved, or was influenced by, global players including the World Bank, UN organizations, and Swedish, French, Japanese, US and Australian donors. In the operation of GMS projects, consultants, investors, financiers and developers have been drawn from all over the world. In terms of trade, Mya Than argues that the GMS does “not aim at economic integration of the participating countries” (Than, 1997:41). Jim Glassman (2010) similarly argues that trade integration has been less among GMS countries than between leading GMS countries (China, Thailand and Vietnam) and East Asian economies that are embedded in the global economy. Glassman argues that the GMS is serving the expansion of US and Japanese capital in the region (Glassman, 2010). From this vantage point, emphasizing the importance of trade along the Mekong River is misleading.

Geographically, the GMS appears to be ‘sub’ to Southeast Asia as a region, as five members of the GMS are members of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). The ADB publication, *The GMS Beyond Borders*, indicates that, “The GMS is an integral part of the movement toward a greater Asian economic community” without clearly defining “Asian” (ADB, 2004). Although the GMS and ASEAN are in no way institutionally organized as being part of one another, ASEAN appears to be a broader *de facto* framework for the GMS and the GMS appears to be automatically embedded in ASEAN. Success for the GMS is thought, or at least expressed in diplomatic rituals to be, important for the realization of the ASEAN Economic Community, according to Thailand’s former Prime Minister Yungluck Shinwatra (The Nation, 2011). This understanding is recurring, as reflected in the statement of ASEAN Secretary General Rodolfo C. Severino, Jr., a decade earlier:

ASEAN and GMS share the same purposes…. Now, ASEAN makes available a broader regional framework in which GMS can carry out its work…. ASEAN deliberately directs some of its own activities, particularly
those in human resource development, to its four newest members, all of which happen to be in GMS. ASEAN has, in fact, used GMS as a framework for its determined push to integrate its four new members more closely and more quickly with the rest of ASEAN…. These ASEAN programs could thus move forward more quickly with GMS as the sub-regional vanguard (ASEAN, 2000).

Such publicized diplomatic rituals, claiming the two groupings to be in sync with each other, have been overshadowed by the unfolding potential clashes between the two. The clashes have been due in part to the overlapping purposes as mentioned by Mr. Severino. This potential clash was explicitly acknowledged in the 2010 Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity:

The GMS initiative is well in line with the ASEAN Connectivity and AEC [ASEAN Economic Community] Blueprint. The challenge is in ensuring that GMS and ASEAN programmes and projects mesh together very well. This is not likely to be smooth sailing, especially since the two programmes have been pursuing parallel efforts and have sunk substantial investments in certain areas of cooperation… (ASEAN, 2010).

The reason the GMS has not been neatly in sync with ASEAN has largely arisen from China’s role as a major player and financier of the GMS. China has funded (or co-funded with the ADB and development partners) transport and communication projects, as it established itself as a major investor, financier, and player in GMS countries – especially Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar (Hensengerth, 2009; Summers, 2008; Wade, 2011). Major transport and communication corridors, supposed to be part of what is called ASEAN Connectivity, are being implemented under the GMS economic corridors (East-West, North-South, and Southern) project, which appears to mock the ASEAN Connectivity Master Plan’s motto “One Vision, One Identity, One Community” (see e.g. ASEAN, 2008).

The dominant role of China in the GMS makes it even more inaccurate to label the GMS as ‘sub’ to Southeast Asia. Historically, China has never been a member of the region, nor has it been under the influence of any Southeast Asian polities. To the contrary, Southeast Asian polities were vassal states to Chinese imperial courts at one time or another. Contemporarily, China sees the GMS as a “land bridge” between China and Southeast Asia and portrays itself as “participating” in the GMS (see Summers, 2008: 76).
This signals the sustained rupture between the GMS and ASEAN in terms of geographic conception. In this way, the ADB’s affixing China to five riparian states and giving the group an appearance of being ‘sub’ to Southeast Asia is inaccurate and misleading.

If ‘sub’ is problematic, so is ‘Greater’. Some argue that ‘Greater’ signifies the inclusion of China, which is not a member of ASEAN, the Mekong River Commission, or the ASEAN Mekong Basin Development Cooperation (Diokno & Nguyễn, 2006:173). Some argue that ‘Greater’ came about because the GMS is different from the earlier treatment of the Mekong that was largely limited to river management, water governance and issues in the immediate geographic proximity. The GMS now covers areas beyond the river (or watershed areas), encompassing nation states that share the Mekong (Masviriyakul, 2004). Yet, neither nation-states as the key building blocks of the GMS nor ‘sharing the Mekong’ adequately explain the selective inclusion of two Chinese provinces (Yunnan and Guangxi) in the GMS.

Yang Hongchang argues that China’s size makes it not “appropriate” for the entire country to participate in the GMS (cited in Summers, 2008). This, however, discounts the way China participates in the GMS. The Chinese delegates at GMS meetings, including senior official meetings and GMS summits, are not from Yunnan and Guangxi provincial governments. Instead a majority of delegates as well as those who shape the GMS agenda are from the center (Glassman, 2010; Summers, 2008; Hensengert, 2009; Goh, 2013; Seng, 2008). The Chinese economic development agenda at the provincial level is still directed from the centre, meaning that the primary role to set GMS’s broader agenda lies not in the ‘participating’ territories, but with the central government (Glassman, 2010).

The inclusion of Yunnan is relatively straightforward, as it shares borders with lower Mekong countries (Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam), and the Mekong passes through the province. Regarding Guangxi’s integration into the GMS in 2005, the ADB argued that the province (and Yunnan):

… share borders with other GMS countries. Like Yunnan province, Guangxi has strong linkages with the GMS in, among other things, resources, culture, trade, transport, and tourism. Guangxi’s participation in the GMS Program is seen as a natural northward extension of the GMS’ geography.
- a clear outcome of strengthening economic relations between the PRC and other GMS countries (GMS EOC, 2012; emphasis added).

In fact, Guangxi shares a border only with Vietnam, and the Mekong flows outside the autonomous region. If sharing a border is a criterion, Tibet is a more eligible candidate, as it shares a border with Myanmar, plus the fact that the Mekong originates in Tibet and flows through it to Yunnan. Countering this physical ‘nature’, Tibet was excluded but Myanmar, sharing only about 4% of the river, was included in the GMS, despite strong opposition from local people. In this sense, a dire contradiction is inherent in the conceptualization of the GMS: on the one hand, it utilizes the Mekong as a symbolic defining, or even unifying, feature of the GMS; on the other hand, inclusion and exclusion in the GMS is divorced from the river itself. Moreover, the GMS area does not follow ecological zones along the Mekong, but instead uses nation-state borders as the outer boundaries of the region. This framing has thus prioritized the role of such regional centers as Bangkok and Hanoi, or semi-cores such as Chiang Mai or Myawaddy-Mae Sot, which are far away from the Mekong basin (Glassman, 2010). In sum, ‘Greater’, ‘Mekong’, and ‘Subregion’ – individually or collectively-- as geographic labels of the cooperation are revealed to be an arbitrary construction, aiming at particular modes and goals of development. The ‘Greater Mekong Subregion’ is situated in vague spatial and historical conceptions, which little reflect, if at all, the ADB’s claim that the GMS is a “natural economic area bound together by the Mekong River”. Nonetheless, as the following sections illustrate, this naturalizing rhetoric has been used to legitimize spatial reorganization of the region so that non-local entities can appropriate land and resources from local users for private and commercial profits. In particular, the sections will show that the discursive construction of the GMS as a region mimics the process of nation-state building in terms of territorial claims, centralizing power, and attempting to link places through infrastructure development.
7.4. The Making of the GMS: Mimicry and Deepening of the Nation-State

7.4.1. Imagining the GMS: Mimicry of the Nation-State

The process of capitalist regionalization in the GMS is the process of colonialism with two characteristics: “mimicry” (Bhabha, 1994) of nation-state building and deepening the new regime of property relations reconfigured by the process of nation-state building. In terms of the mimicry, the way the GMS has been imagined as a region in the same way as that of imagining a nation-state. Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined community” (Anderson, 2006) is relevant to the case of the GMS in that the ADB discursively fostered the GMS as a collective community in ways similar to the process of nation-state building. For example, in Myanmar, the nationalist discourse constructs the entire territory within postcolonial borders as a shared space inherited from forefathers, disregarding the actual history. The ADB midterm review of the GMS 2002-2012 strategic framework states: “The GMS is rich in natural and human resources, and its people are bound by a shared culture and history” (ADB 2007: 2; emphasis added). Despite diverse cultures, histories and conflicts in the ‘region’, GMS countries have readily accepted elite discourses portraying the region as a harmonious community. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, for example, stated in the Third GMS Summit in Vientiane, Laos in 2008 that:

China is ready to work with other countries in the sub-region in an unremitting effort to make our common home a harmonious and prosperous one (Beijing Review No. 16, April 2008, cited in Zhu Zheming (n.d.); emphasis added).

Thailand’s former Prime Minister Abhisit Vijjajiva stated at the first Mekong River Commission Summit in April 2010:

The Mekong River […] should not be seen as a river that divides ASEAN member countries. Rather, it should be seen as a river where traditions and cultures as well as the common striving for developmental progress and prosperity converge (MRC, 2010).

One of many bulletins celebrating the Phnom Pen Plan for Development Management (PPP) under the GMS program states that:
Although the PPP alumni come from the six countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), they call themselves “GMS citizens” (ADB, 2005).

The Burmese minister of national planning, David Abel, said with respect to development of the Mekong:

We believe that despite having our own national identity, we have one common aspiration, that is cooperation and development for peace and stability (Reuters, 1995).

All these statements reflect the buzzwords of the GMS discourse known as the 3Cs: community, connectivity, and competitiveness -- that are the guiding principles for economic growth in the region. These 3Cs have been mainstreamed, as laid down by the 2nd Summit in 2005, as "the building blocks for achieving the GMS vision" (ADB, 2005).

According to Bank President Haruhiko Kuroda:

The six countries that share the Mekong River... are together reaping the benefits of increased connectivity, competitiveness, and a greater sense of community that would not have been possible two decades ago.... Governments in the subregion have worked hard to make the vision of “borders without barriers” a reality.... (ADB, 2005).

Premier Wen’s ‘our common home’, Thai PM Abhisit’s ‘convergence’, the Bank President’s ‘greater sense of community’, and the Bank’s ‘shared culture and history’ and ‘GMS citizens’ and the Burmese minister’s ‘one common aspiration’ construct the idea that the region is a shared space that belongs equally to all inhabitants. Such discourses have practical outcomes in that the claim for common regional ownership in effect obscures and displaces indigenous peoples’ rights to self-determination in relation to the resources on which their lives depend.

Thongchai Winichakul’s (1994) work on the construction of the Siamese “geo-body” is similarly helpful in understanding the practice of constructing the GMS as a region. Writing in the context of Siam, Thongchai highlights that mapping and surveying were crucial in the making of modern-nation states. Similar to colonial practices of surveying and mapping, the ADB’s mandate as a self-appointed ‘honest broker’ includes facilitating technical assistance, the aim of which is to produce general knowledge about the region
broadly, and to study particular geographic areas for ‘development’ projects specifically. This knowledge-making technical assistance resembles surveying and mapping of colonial and postcolonial regimes for nation-state building, in that technical assistance involves very detailed and extensive data collection, figuring out the ‘unknown’ spaces and peoples, making them ‘legible’ (Scott, 1998) to the experts, and mapping resources and markets, reflecting what Martin Heidegger (1977) calls ‘enframing’ (gestell) – i.e. generally speaking, turning nature into an epistemological object. By the end of 2013, the Bank had mobilized $330.8 million for knowledge-making technical assistance, of which the Bank had contributed $115 million (ADB, 2014:1).

Similar to the way in which Anderson (2006) shows that print media was a crucial element in fostering a sense of common nationhood, an enormous number of publications about the GMS have been circulated. They highlight people in the region as members of the community, sharing the region, experiences and common aspirations. Various publications use faces of different indigenous people across the region. These studies not only produce the region as a community, but also reinforce region-ness or a sense of togetherness by repeating the same messages of sharing and caring over and over. Collectively, they constitute the GMS as a discursive region, an ‘imagined regional community’ (Sidaway, 2008) or a ‘dream world’ (Wong, 2010) of harmony and prosperity. The essence of this process is the production of a shared space for intervention. It should be mentioned, however, that most ADB publications are in English. This is not surprising, as the targeted audience is not the poor, indigenous populations in the region.

7.4.2. Deepening the Displacement of Indigenous Self-Determination

In terms of property relations, the GMS has deepened the regime of property relations, earlier introduced by nation-states, which took away local peoples’ self-determination over resource rights. As Thongchai (1994) argues, it is not just surveying, mapping and diplomatic treaty signing that make nation-state boundaries. The process also involves new geographic discourses displacing indigenous ones, a process that subsequently redefines property relations and the right to decide. Under the nation-state building process, countries in the region went through the process of redefining property
relations in land and resources, many of which became the property of the state. For instance, the Myanmar constitution says, “The Union [the state] is the ultimate owner of all lands and all natural resources above and below the ground, above and beneath the water and in the atmosphere in the Union” (Government of Myanmar, 2008). This contradicts the historical experience that today’s ethnic states were not part of the union until 1947 (see Chapter 4) and that land use/ownership in many places depended on customary systems (see Sakhong & Keenon, 2014; Myint, 2013; Thar, 2014; Ban, 2003). The modern Myanmar state, through successive military regimes, has undermined those previous customary property relations and taken over all the lands as state property, thus making itself a colonial regime. Similarly in other countries including Thailand, Laos and the south of China, states have pursued projects for plantation agriculture and environmental enclosures through practices and discourses of land, environmental and resource management that limit local people’s access to natural resources. Agricultural and environmental enclosures, which deprive people of the rights to self-determination over resources, while asserting state control through the bureaucratization of management, ultimately “free up” land and labour for industrial and commercial agriculture (Sturgeon et al., 2013).

In the GMS, the new expert knowledge with grand development narratives, framed at the sub-regional/transnational level as opposed to local and indigenous typology of resource use, has deepened this process of reconfiguring property relations. As discussed earlier, the GMS as a region has been mapped for commercial interests, but not in terms of ecological zones, cultural grids or local resource utilization. Experts in offices remote from those natural resources drew up development master plans, while indigenous peoples’ everyday use of resources was being measured against a cash economy (Glassman, 2010), but all in the name of resource sharing to benefit the regional community as a whole.

It should be emphasized that the crucial point is not only about ‘resource sharing’ but also about ‘the right to decide’. Attempts to assert control over resources require transferring the right to make decisions from indigenous resource users to outsiders, especially state actors who are to manage these resources in the name of benefiting all. The rationality of such transfers can be detected in the words of former Bank President
Morita, under whose reign the GMS emerged. Commenting on the 20th anniversary of the GMS, he stated:

> While it is important to protect an individual country and make it continuously relevant, the real priority should be on the benefit to the whole region. That should be the basis and power for long-term stability. How a country uses its land and human resources depends on the role that it wishes to carry out for its people and the international communities. It is essential that these efforts benefit all (ADB, 2012:5).

For Morita, trade and investment alone were not sufficient to ensure long-term regional stability. The basis and power for long-term peace required that the efforts in the region benefit everyone. This emphasis points to the fact that resources in the region were supposed to be shared with all, which entailed “making” resources belong to all. Having a sense of common ownership to the region and its resources, and subscribing to ‘strive for developmental progress and prosperity’ for ‘long term stability’ has enabled ‘outsiders’ to assert authority in the affairs of resource management within the newly-created regional domain of development. As a result, indigenous peoples who had been autonomous resource users for centuries became subjected to development interventions from experts whose ideological orientation privileged private sector appropriation of resources for commercial interests over local use.

Although the Bank’s public discourses have included ‘pro-poor’, ‘poverty alleviation’, ‘participatory development’, and ‘inclusive growth’, new knowledge about development has been made exclusively by experts and consultants, funded by development partners, commissioned by the Bank, approved by governments, and executed by unelected bureaucrats and technocrats. A vast majority of people in the region have had nothing to do with decisions and actions about the ‘development’ discussed and planned by the bureaucrats and technocrats (Dosch, 2007).

Through numerous studies, reports, bulletins, and technical research and planning documents, new knowledge produced by experts and government officials has been identified, mapped and proposed for action. Problems, required actions, guiding principles, and solutions, all geared towards trade and investment, have been discussed and decided on in closed-door meetings such as Summits, Ministerial Conferences, Senior Official Meetings, and Working Group Meetings and Workshops. For instance, the
webpage for The 6th GMS Economic Corridors Forum held in Hanoi in August 2014 listed the targeted participants as:

- GMS ministers/vice-ministers
- GMS national coordinators
- GMS senior officials from different line agencies
- Development partners
- Private sector
- GMS business forum
- ADB representatives

It noted, "Participation is by invitation only".47 Local people were thus shut out from the chamber of decision-making populated by outsiders. By outsiders, I mean a wide range of actors who live far away from the Mekong and/or those whose immediate survival is not dependent on the riparian natural resources that they planned to access, manage and appropriate. These 'outsiders' included ADB bureaucrats/technocrats, international development partners, foreign government representatives, members of funding agencies, experts and consultants, bureaucrats from GMS member states, and private sectors representatives.

Although planning and implementation have been highly influenced by a wide range of actors such as business people, bankers, and technical experts, the state has retained a primary role in the GMS. According to the organizational structure of the GMS, the highest authority is vested at the summit level represented by the heads of governments. Coordinating offices of each member state are housed in national level ministries. Negotiation, decision-making and implementation of actions are exclusively in the hands of state bureaucrats (see Figure 7.1 and 7.2).

47 This information was posted on the ADB website, available at http://www.adb.org/news/events/sixth-gms-economic-corridors-forum [Last access: August 2014].
Figure 7-1. GMS Institutional Structure
Figure 7-2. Organizational Framework of the GMS Economic Cooperation
Source: ADB
Meanwhile, the Bank has consistently enrolled state support and participation in the GMS by reinforcing the critical role of "country ownership" of the GMS (that is, not local ownership). For instance, the 2012-2022 Strategic Framework document starts with a paragraph that portrays the GMS as if the ADB supports from the sideline:

In 1992, six countries—Cambodia, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) (Yunnan Province), the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam—established the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program (GMS Program) as an activity-based subregional economic cooperation program, and asked the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to be the program’s secretariat (ADB, 2011: 1).

The same document repeats:

The GMS countries have strong ownership of the program, but they also appreciate the important secretariat role that ADB has played. They would like ADB to continue to play a secretariat role and to enhance it further by capitalizing on the respect and trust it has gained from member countries to help forge agreements across countries on some of the more challenging aspects of the program (ADB 2011: 7).

President Morita was even more explicit that the country ownership referred to line ministries and planning agencies:

We carried out the process not as a diplomatic effort. Concerned line ministries and planning agencies in GMS countries shouldered the responsibility and ownership of the initiative (ADB, 2012).

One of the ADB’s 20-year anniversary reports illustrates the exclusive decision-making process so as to highlight the country ownership of the program:

In 2002, the GMS countries pulled together the various sector approaches with their associated programs and projects into a comprehensive strategic framework for subregional development, the GMS Strategic Framework. In the same year, heads of government endorsed the framework at the first GMS Summit as a “key means through which closer economic cooperation and prosperity will be achieved.” Nearly a decade later, at the fourth GMS Summit in December 2011, GMS heads of government reconfirmed the value of the framework and recognized the significant achievements of the program across all the areas of focus (ADB 2012d: 6).
The way the GMS works through the sovereign states supports what Jayasuria (2008) calls “regulatory regionalism,” meaning that regionalization does not run above the state. Instead, the GMS is a region “instigated within the state” and “runs on the tracks of the national policy processes” (2008: 29). The GMS reinforcement of the role of the state by privileging its decision-making power points to the GMS broader embedding in a capitalist system and its complex relations with sovereign states. As Ellen Wood argues, the capitalist system and the sovereign state have developed alongside each other since the beginning of the capitalist era in the 15th century (Wood, cited in Sharma, 2015). State power has always depended on its linkage to the globally expanding capitalist system and continued access to markets across territories, while “the entirety of the capitalist era has been the making of a global space that [hinges] on the formation of putatively sovereign states” (Sharma, 2015:39). Therefore, the ADB’s privileging of sovereign states vis-à-vis people’s self-determination is in line with the systematic capitalist regionalization in the GMS, which inherently works through the formation and deepening of sovereign states, “representatives” of which are ideologically determined to hold control over the means of production (land, resources, and people).

7.4.3. Depoliticization, Displacing the Right to Self-Determination, Transferring Resources

Deepening the displacement of local people’s rights to make decisions has been furthered by the ADB culture of avoiding ‘politics’. Again, this move is systemic to capitalism, in which the dominant mode of thinking ideologically separates politics and economics. Sharma (2015) makes this point clear. As she argues:

From the beginning, capitalism depended on both the “economic” coercion of capitalist markets (which rewarded those who were the most competitive, usually with the highest rates of productivity, and impoverished the rest), and the “extraeconomic” coercive force that state authorities would use to quell popular resistance and enforce the system of private property…. [But by] consolidating all legitimate forms of extraeconomic violence in the hands of state authorities, the violence necessary for the establishment and reproduction of capitalist markets is rendered invisible (37-38).

In addition, the spatial projection of extra-economic coercive forces in the national sphere and economic coercive forces of capitalist markets in the regional sphere makes
it appear that politics (extra-economic coercive forces) are national affairs and economics are extraterritorial, or regional. In this way the coercive forces producing capitalist social relations that transcend national boundaries (including depriving people of self-determination over resources) have been rendered invisible.

To demonstrate the point, adhering to the Cold War politics of the Non-alignment Movement and ASEAN's non-interference policy, as reflected in the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, the GMS program observes the sovereignty of each member state. The Five Principles -- mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and cooperation for mutual benefit; and peaceful co-existence — are all about keeping other countries out of domestic affairs in the name of sovereignty and territorial integrity (Xi, 2014). Domestic affairs means matters considered 'political'. In addition, article V of the founding charter of the ADB prohibits “political activities”.

Buzzwords in the GMS, such as equal consultation, mutual respect, and non-intervention in members’ domestic affairs (in order to build trust and confidence among neighbours) have been routinely expressed in official meetings and statements. Cooperation in the GMS, therefore, has been limited to 'economic matters' and has avoided political issues such as resource conflicts, public protests, human rights abuses, violence, (lack of) democracy and justice, and displacement, all of which have emerged out of displacing people's self-determination and resource rights. In the transnational chambers of state officials, bureaucrats, and technocrats, these political issues, affecting vulnerable people, have been ignored on the basis of being 'political'.

Conceiving of the GMS as a 'natural' entity, and integration in the region as a 'natural' process at the end of the Cold War, after 30 years of conflict in the region, the poverty that has emerged in the region has been considered to be the result of 'politics' (Glassman, 2010). 'Doing politics', thus, is conceived of as something 'unnatural' that hinders the supposedly natural process of economic cooperation (Glassman, 2010; 48)

48 In recent years, however, the Bank has recognized the political character of fragility and conflict. Thus, it has integrated conflict sensitivity measures to its development approach (see Stephen, 2014).
Käkönen and Hirsch, 2009). To overcome the problem of poverty, then, is to overcome ‘politics’. Overcoming politics, however, does not mean to address conflicts, but to ignore them -- at the level of regional cooperation. This sentiment is reflected in the Bank President Morita’s vision of the GMS:

I tried to ensure that the [GMS] meeting would not become a place for negotiation but rather for agreement of purpose. We focused on our common values of modesty, spirit of cooperation, kindness and avoidance of conflict (ADB, 2012).

7.4.4. Infrastructure Development and Transferring Resources to the Private Sector

The culture of avoiding 'politics' has been furthered by the ADB focus on large-scale infrastructure projects and the promotion of private sector involvement in the GMS. Transport and communication infrastructure and development assistance have been two defining features of the GMS. The link between the two, infrastructure and the private sector, has arisen from the ADB promotion of infrastructural development in the sub-region, such as highways, railroads and port facilities, hydropower dams, power transmission lines, and telecommunication infrastructure, which are too capital-intensive to be undertaken by individual states or investors alone (Middleton, 2008a,b). These projects have required cooperation and assistance from multiple stakeholders, thus paving the way for international donors and large corporations to invest in the GMS. The Bank's mobilization of financial resources has promoted ownership by private sector stakeholders through such systems as BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer) (Adams, 2001; Chavez, 2001; Middleton, 2008a,b). GMS countries – especially Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia – do not have sufficient private capital or expertise, thus “opening up the [countries] to foreign companies, who bring with them their own experts, personnel, know-how, technology and demands” (Guttal, 2001:6).

The Bank’s role is admittedly not to be the funder of all GMS projects. The ADB asserts itself as a ‘broker’. As the next chapter shows, the Bank’s main task appears to be as an ‘advertising agency’ as it facilitates knowledge-making activities and the mobilization of funds to make possible the GMS as the framework for cooperation. In a sense, the Bank is a mechanism that produces knowledge about the region, and methods of cooperation
and implementation that are acceptable to member countries. It facilitates technical assistance projects including:

- Consultation/consultant activities
- Research activities in identifying potential projects
- Conducting feasibility/impact assessment studies
- Preparing region-wide master plans, strategic frameworks, and sector-specific working plans.

While the Bank has provided concessional loans to GMS governments for infrastructural projects, its most significant activity has been mobilizing funding from multilateral agencies and GMS members, which are the major sources of GMS financing. Therefore, what the ADB has really done has not been financing and administration of every single project, such as roads or dams, but the creation of the GMS as a broad discursive domain for development cooperation. The Bank has created possibilities for cooperation, as it has convinced GMS countries and development donors of opportunities in the GMS program (discussed further in the next chapter).

Situated in neoliberal discourses of state inefficiency in economic affairs, the Bank and the international community see GMS governments as being run by old bureaucrats from the command-based economic era (ESPCAP, 2002). The Bank increasingly promotes private sector involvement in the GMS as part of regulatory reforms and encourages each country to mobilize private funding (i.e. private sector participation) (ADB 2011:10). The creation of a "Subregional Growth Zone through Constructive Business Facilitation" in 1994 was the beginning of significant private sector involvement in the GMS. In 1996, the ADB recognized that "private sector finance, expertise, management skills, and technology will be a key to the dynamism of all GMS countries" (ESPCAP, 2002: 7). Since then, business groups, including the GMS Business Forum, a Private Sector Advisory Group, and a Subregional Investment Working Group have been established. According to the Bank’s Long Term Strategic Framework (Strategy 2020), the Bank plans

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49 Although net development assistance from multilateral donors was $112.3 billion in 2008, $119.6 billion in 2009, and $128.7 billion in 2010 (ADB, 2011: 9), donor funding for the already multi-billion dollars project are less promising for the future due to global economic crisis, and diversion of development funding to climate change mitigation in the 2000s.
to increase private sector operations in core areas to 50% by 2020, including regional cooperation, while the Strategic Framework (2012-2022) emphasizes the “critical role of the private sector as an engine of GMS development” (ADB, 2011: 5). As a broader private sector strategy, the Bank has argued that, “a strong and dynamic private sector is crucial to long-term, rapid economic growth, a necessary condition for sustained poverty reduction” (Adams, 2001: 14).

The Bank’s push towards privatization is acceptable to GMS states, as they increasingly move towards privatization of formerly state-controlled industries. A good example is Myanmar. Beginning in the early 1990s, the military junta started privatizing and liberalizing the economy by introducing a new Foreign Investment Law, while allowing private domestic businesses to operate formerly state-owned enterprises. In GMS meetings, former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt and Planning Minister David Abel praised the role of the private sector in achieving GMS goals. David Abel said in an interview with the BBC, for example, that the government's priority is “to allow the people to revive the economy…. [Under] the current market economic system, we want the private sector and the people to take part in the process” (Pembaruan, 1995).

Not surprisingly, key players in the private sector in Myanmar happen to be members of ruling class families and cronies that have monopolized the country’s economy. To give a few examples, Htoo Company, Max Myanmar Company, Kanbawza, Iyar Shwe War, Asia World etc. have all been closely linked to military generals. These companies have monopolized construction, real estate, air travel, tourism, luxury resorts, agriculture, export/imports, logging, telecommunications, transportation, banking, other industries, and natural resource sectors including oil/gas and high value gem and jade trade, creating massive private wealth in the 1990s and 2000s (Irrawaddy, 2011; WSJ, 2015). Their investments and annual revenue have run to multi-hundred millions of dollars. For instance, Htoo Company’s owner Tayza is believed to be a billionaire, Zaw Zaw (Max Myanmar)'s annual revenue is US$500 million (Reuters, 2012), and Asia World got the contract to build a US$ 3.6 billion Myint Son dam before the Burmese government decided to suspend the project due to public protests (WSJ, 2015). At the same time as they have created private wealth, they have also created mass poverty by serving as economic agents of a military regime that has oppressed, dispossessed and impoverished people
to the extent that Myanmar ranked 150 out of 184 on the UN’s Human Development Index in 2014. According to the UN figure at the end of 2014, almost one million people had been displaced in Myanmar. Displaced people also happened to be from areas where natural resource extraction and mega-projects had been planned or operated. For instance, the Shan Human Rights Foundation reported in 2014 that communities in more than 60 villages lost their land and houses to Asia World’s access road and other infrastructure construction for the US$ 1.4 billion Kunlong dam in the Shan State (SHRF, 2014; see more in Chapters 5 and 7). The increasing role of military-linked private sector involvement has meant giving the GMS a more exclusive business nature; the more the private sector has become involved in profit-seeking projects, the more ‘politics’ has been avoided. Thus, the specific discourses and practices constructed and institutionalized by the GMS have become reflected in extreme asymmetrical power relations in very specific institutional, political and economic settings (Peet and Watts, 1993:231). These outcomes also reflect a historically contingent political economic process that has both appropriated and transformed nature as well as society (Pred, 1984).

7.5. Post-battlefield Marketplace & Development: GMS & Myanmar Fit Each Other

GMS Beyond the Battlefield: Doing Economics, Going Pro-Poor, Chasing Poverty

The Bank’s encouragement of private sector involvement, which has entailed an avoidance of politics, raises a serious question as to whether it could possibly help the poor, whose dispossession and poverty have to do with private sector actors who are implicated in violent political economic affairs. A discourse analysis of GMS program-related publications reveals that the GMS appears to be a highly populist program, aiming to serve the region’s 326 million people, most of whom are poor. GMS publications, statements, reports and technical papers feature such rosy discourses as “pro-poor”, “people-oriented”, “freeing their people from poverty”, “opportunities for all their citizens,” all to be achieved through the creation of a more integrated and harmonious region (ADB, 2004; 2012).
The Bank’s poverty focus, however, was almost an accident (Guttal, 2001). ADB President Tadao Chino, out of his personal interest, once recommended a focus on poverty, which then became the core agenda (Guttal, 2001:10). The Bank and the Japanese Ministry of Finance were not prepared to address poverty, but anti-poverty was something no one would oppose (Guttal, 2001). For the Bank itself, the new turn to anti-poverty was helpful in raising financial resources for the Asian Development Fund (Guttal, 2001). Japanese and European governments contributed multimillions of dollars to fight poverty. Whether the original intent of President Chino was a genuine poverty focus, rather than to give the Bank a populist look, the idea still bolstered the Bank’s image as an organization serious about fighting poverty.

Under the façade of a populist and anti-poverty outlook came the framework for development, which is overtly free market oriented (Glassman, 2010; Guttal, 2001). The Bank set out to support activities for market-based economic growth so that poverty alleviation could be achieved. This understanding is common in development rhetoric, in spite of exposure as false in what James Ferguson’s calls the “Anti-Politics Machine” (Ferguson, 1990). In a sense, 'development' or 'poverty alleviation' is the discourse, economic liberalization is the approach, and transnationalization of previously nation-state bounded, locally-appropriated resources for exploitation by market players is the practice – all for the purpose of regional economic growth in the name of benefiting everyone. As such, the Bank’s priority has first and foremost been to create conditions conducive to market-based trade and investment. The mechanism has been for the Bank, through development assistance, to link together various parts of the region through transport and communication infrastructure. As the Bank claims, the “underlying strategy of the GMS Program was to link the GMS countries through improvements in infrastructure, thus overcoming domestic constraints and promoting trade and investment to boost economic growth further” (ADB, 2004). The Bank indeed sees the GMS as a "regional entity dependent upon closer linkages in transport... trade, and commerce" (ADB, 2004:8). Out of the total $51.3 billion investment for the 2013-2022 Regional Investment Framework, the transport sector constitutes the highest share with 85% (est. $44.1 billion), according to the ADB report in 2012 (compared to a 0.5% investment in the Human Resource Sector). Up to September 2011, the ADB had implemented 55 projects worth of US$ 14
billion, including sub-regional roads, airport facilities, and power transmission lines (ADB, 2011: 1).

This infrastructure is situated in the Economic Corridors, which are the core geographic strips within the GMS, in which transportation and communication development initiatives have primarily been concentrated. The economic corridor approach was adopted during the 8th Ministerial Meeting in Manila in 1998. In 2007, GMS ministers agreed to expand from original three corridors (East-West, North-South, and Southern) to a total of nine\textsuperscript{50} (see Figure 7.3).

\textbf{Figure 7-3. GMS Countries and Economic Corridors}
\textit{Source: ADB}

\textsuperscript{50} The initial three coordinators are: East-West Economic Corridor connecting Molamyein (Myanmar) and Da Nang (Vietnam); North-South Economic Corridor connecting Kunming (Yunnan) and Bangkok; and Southern Economic Corridor connecting Bangkok to various sites in Vietnam.
As shown on the map above, these Economic Corridors cover a large area of the region. These corridors, however, are not natural or coincident. They have been strategically selected to facilitate trade, most importantly linking (or aiming to link) major markets, ‘economic hubs’, and ‘nodal points,’ "to enhance economic activities and benefit" (ADB, 2010:3). To borrow Aihwa Ong’s (2005: 97) phrase, these Economic Corridors are the "limited grouping of sites" beyond national borders.51

A focus on infrastructure was not an accident. At the outset, the GMS aimed at developing a transport, energy, and communication infrastructure for the purpose of resource sharing, trade and investment in a free market context. As former Bank president Morita said:

To begin with, I emphasized starting something simple and manageable with a strategic impact. At an earlier stage of our activities, I recommended focusing on connecting village roads across borders, even if it was just a 10-meter connection, in order to link countries. The village roads become international roads once they are connected (ADB, 2012: 5).

After 20 years, an infrastructure focus continues. Speaking on the new $50 billion pipeline of projects, the Bank’s Vice President Stephen Groff mentions that:

The next generation projects can help boost cross border trade and investments, and stimulate jobs and growth…. Completing missing transport links remains at the core of the GMS program…. (ADB, 2013b).

In addition to developments in the transportation and telecommunication infrastructure, the program has also covered agriculture, energy, the environment, human resource development, investment, and trade and tourism – all in the name of anti-poverty.

The way the Bank has promoted the GMS by connecting places in the name of

51 The Bank claims that the integration of economies through these corridors is to utilize naturally existing ‘complementaries’. The actual unfolding of the GMS shows, however, that resources are not simply the natural complementaries readily available to be shared; they are ‘made’ available by fundamental reconfiguration of property relations. In particular this process transforms the peripheries of each nation-state into the resource cores of the GMS. The power to make this happens requires, to borrow Timothy Mitchell’s words, "meticulous organization of space, movement, sequence and position" (Mitchell, 1991: 92-3).
development, moreover, is exactly how the Myanmar government has used development as a counterinsurgency measure in border areas where ethnic minority armies operate.

7.6. Case Study: Myanmar and GMS Fitting Each Other

As demonstrated in Chapter 4, the Burmese state claims sovereign territorial control over modern Burma through a geographic imagination of the territory within the postcolonial boundaries as a common home. This claim obscures and discredits ethnic minority peoples’ historical entitlement to ancestral land, and a 70-plus year armed struggle against the state for self-determination. In doing so, ethnic peoples’ rights to ancestral land have been de-centred, but ethnic Burmese rulers, as ‘outsiders’ to minority regions, have captured the right to decide.

The very discourses and forms of development that the GMS has promoted are similar to the Burmese state’s approach to development as part of its counterinsurgency strategy for nation-state building. In January 2012, the Burmese government’s chief of the peace negotiating team, Minister U Aung Min, told Radio Free Asia’s Burmese language program with respect to the ethnic armed struggle:

… It is not fair to tell people who have had guns for their entire life not to hold guns [i.e. armed resistance]. If we don’t want them to be holding guns anymore, we need to make them rich, because no one will want to hold a gun if they are rich. Nobody will hold a gun if their territory is developed. If we [help them become rich and developed], they will automatically abandon arms by themselves (RFA, 2012; emphasis added).

In 2011, Myanmar’s President U Thein Sein said in a parliamentary speech in the context of ethnic unity52 (i.e. ending ethnic conflict and nation-state building):

Geographically divided ethnic nationalities’ territories must be bridged by building roads, railways and bridges. Health and education standards must be promoted. Economic infrastructure must be developed. The socio-economic status of ethnic people must be promoted using roads, bridges, schools, and clinics (Sein, 2011).

52 Instead of saying ending conflict, he said the problem is the lack of ethnic unity (see Chapter 4).
Regardless of the fact that poverty is not the primary cause of the armed conflict, the president and his minister have insisted on solving armed conflict by bringing ‘development’ and bridging territories. U Aung Min happened to be Railways Minister at that time. The purpose of referring to the president and his minister is not to disregard their good intentions, if any, regarding development of ethnic territories; it is instead to highlight the ideas about development and violence embedded in the ideology of two key state actors.

Their take on development, however, is not new or unique. Instead, the will to develop ‘ethnic territories’ or border areas has been an important part of the Burmese state’s counterinsurgency operation since the 1960s against Burmese communists (see Myoe, 1999). Since the late 1980s, the Burmese state has worked development-as-counterinsurgency through the bureaucratic apparatus of the Ministry of Border Affairs (formally Ministry of Progress of Border Areas, National Races and Development Affairs). In 1989, the first meeting of the Central Committee for the Progress of Border Areas and ‘National Races’ (hereafter border area committee) was held in the military operations meeting hall. The committee was composed of top leaders of the military government, with General Than Shwe as Chairperson and his four immediate deputies as members (expanded to 26 members in 2011) (Soe, 2011: 24). In order to execute the committee’s policies, a Ministry of Border Affairs was established in 1992. Currently there are 14 branch offices in different ethnic states. At both national and state (provincial) level governments, Ministry of Border Affairs officials are senior military officers. The vision of the Ministry is:

- To preserve and maintain the security, prevalence of law and order, and regional peace and tranquility of the border areas;
- To further strengthen the amity among the national races and to build the Union spirit;

53 The Ministry went through various changes. It started in 1989 with a committee to implement the development of border areas and national races. The committee was composed of a central committee and a working committee. The committee office was opened in April 1992. In September the same year, a Ministry for the Development of Border Areas and National Races was established to replace the committee. In 1994, it was renamed to Ministry of Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs. In 2011, it was replaced with the Ministry of Border Affairs.
• To uplift the socio-economic development of national races by establishing basic infrastructure for border areas development;

• To cherish and preserve the culture, literature and customs of the national races;

• To propagate religion and dispensation in the border areas;

• To pursue the basic, higher and livelihood trainings for the future of nationalities youths;

• To let the nationalities youths shoulder their regional development measures with their own sense (Ministry of Border Affairs, 2015).

The essence of the Ministry, then, is to establish a mechanism in the name of development for the sake of “teaching” ethnic minorities the union spirit and the three national causes (non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of ethnic unity, and perpetuation of sovereignty), which has been the primary discourse of state sovereignty under the military regime since 1988. The patron of this initiative, Senior General Than Shwe, explicitly said that implementing border area development to “narrow the socio-economic gap among national races in the Union means serving the three national causes” and “ethnic unity” (Shwe, 1995: 25, 152-153, In SLORC n.d.).

The logic here is that the government’s efforts for the development of border areas and the national races involves narrowing the socio-economic gap among national races, upon which ethnic unity (i.e. the end of conflict) and national sovereignty depend. That is, to the state, the development of ethnic minority areas equals the end of conflict. Senior General Than Shwe’s speeches have informed the developmental work of the government so powerfully that they have been taken as revelation-like directives, as the singular narrative for thinking about development and ethnic unity. Government publications and autobiographies of senior officers have repeated these directives as important reasons for development efforts (e.g. Ministry of Information, 2011, 2008; Soe, 2011). Viewed in this light, development efforts for border areas are ‘political’. At the operational level, they have been part of counterinsurgency measures that attempt to bring people and places into the orbit of central government administration vis-à-vis ethnic armed groups.

Myint Soe, a former Director General of Border Affairs, writes that:
With independence comes “domestic destructionists” [i.e. insurgency] as the legacy of colonialism. People were subjected to divide and rule for the sake of the disintegration of the Union. [Insurgent groups], using various – isms, imported from abroad, tried to capture and exercise power like absolutists (Soe, 2011:13-14).

He then ran through the insurgencies of the communists, the Karen, Mon, Mujahid Muslim, Shan, Kachin, Karenni and PaO ethnic groups, as well as the Wa and Kokant groups, depicted as having been manipulated by the communists. As discussed in Chapter 4, the government has seen insurgencies as the result of manipulations by “colonialists” and “neocolonialists,” but not as a result of ethnic people’s claims for autonomy over ancestral land. The rationale has been that outsiders’ manipulations have resulted in conflicts that prolonged poverty. Because of poverty and low levels of education, border and ethnic minority areas have been prone to outside manipulation causing them to fight their Burmese blood brothers. This delusion has thus trapped them in vicious cycles of poverty and conflict.

Just as the GMS members have seen a post-conflict environment in the GMS region as allowing economic cooperation to take place, the Burmese military has also seen ceasefire agreements since the late 1980s as allowing it to pursue development for the people there, according to Senior General Than Shwe (1989, in SLORC n.d.). The government had not been able to assert control in many border areas until 1989, when ethnic armed groups in the northeast of Myanmar, mainly the Wa and Kokant, mutinied from the communist party. They signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burmese military. Other groups such as the Karen and Kachin followed suit. This was not the end of armed conflict, but only a trial period. The political and military situation was that ethnic groups still kept their armies and wanted political dialogue with the government to discuss a federal state that would ensure more local autonomy. Instead of political dialogue, the government seized the ceasefire as a “post-conflict” opportunity to assert control over border areas through development. This was the point when development for border areas and ethnic people gained strength.

Instead of recognizing ethnic people’s historical and political rights to ancestral land and engaging in a political conversation towards federalism and self-determination, the government used ‘anti-poverty’ measures as tools to weaken ethnic armed groups in
their areas, while asserting state power by expanding a developmental bureaucracy. Similar to Ferguson’s finding in Lesotho (Ferguson, 1990), the state used development as a tool for bureaucratic expansion. Calling development of border areas and national races a ‘national duty’, the state set the primary focus on the transportation and communication infrastructure.

Various books have been published demonstrating the government’s border area development efforts. For example, the Burmese government published several hundred-page reports titled “tain kyo pyi pyhu” (serving the country). The fourth report, for example, contained almost 800 pages listing in detail the number of roads, bridges, dams, telecommunication stations, schools, and so on, that the government had built as part of a broad nation-state building effort. David Steinberg points out that the military government since 1988 had built more roads and bridges than all the Burmese governments since independence. Steinberg refers to this phenomenon as “legitimacy through construction” (Steinberg, 2007).

A government publication outlining development efforts of the military junta from 1988 to 2007 states in the section on the Shan State:

In the past, the geography of the Shan State would be recorded as a ‘large territory with mountains keeping people apart; many ethnic peoples being divided by rivers’. The military government, registering a new historical account, should record: ‘Mountains are not barriers, but people are; rivers do not divide, but people do’. That is why the government has eliminated colonialists’ actions that are barriers and dividers [among people]…. The government has established a new road of peace and a bridge of grace (Ministry of Information, 2011: 161).

The quote refers to the fact that colonialists and neocolonialists had manipulated ethnic groups to fight against the Burmese state, but the state has addressed the problem through development. The report states that, in the Shan State as in other states, the government has built new roads totalling 4,634 miles, including paved roads for a total of 1,958 miles, extended railroads in the Shan State for another 300 miles, 4 new airports, 18 new bridges longer than 180 feet, and 326 new bridges not longer than 180 feet. The 426 page-long report includes other sections on hydropower, irrigation, and
telecommunication projects, as well as construction of clinics and hospitals (Ministry of Information, 2008).

Not only were roads and bridges constructed, but also schools were established and teachers sent from towns to teach the ‘union spirit’ to ethnic minorities. The education and religion sectors were directed to work together for the spread of Theravada Buddhism in border areas. Buddhists temples and monasteries were established, including in Christian and traditionally animistic communities. Up to 2011, 52 pagodas, 301 monasteries and 111 other Buddhist religious buildings had been established (compared to the establishment of 53 postal and 46 telegraph services).

The government’s political intent is clear: to set up administrative establishments in ethnic areas vis-à-vis ethnic armed groups through development. General Than Shwe said in the first meeting of the Border Area and Nation Races Central Committee meeting in 1989 that the government would not use the term “Frontier Administration” to avoid ethnic minorities’ thinking that Burmans were coming back again under a new name after the communists (the majority of whom were Burmese) had left, and that instead of calling it ‘administration’, the government would call it ‘committee’ (Soe, 2011: 12). The state’s purpose was to rule, but under a new façade as a developmental committee.

Striking features in the government’s development efforts in border areas were that in addition to infrastructure projects, there was a repeated reminder to teach “Union Spirit” to ethnic youth; and that the border area committee’s directive was to establish “modern administration” and a “normal governance structure” as development in border areas gained momentum.” Evidence of a modern administration included police stations, judges, and administrative bodies for education, health, a judiciary and agriculture (2nd Central Committee Meeting, April 30, 2002, In Soe 2011: 161).

Directives throughout the 2000s demonstrated that the central state expanded its encroachment into border areas by spatial reorganization of ethnic states, adding townships with new bureaucratic offices for health, education, agriculture and livestock. State administrators designated areas for farmlands and established villages for swidden farmers. Officers from the center were directed to visit border areas regularly to supervise strictly the implementation of development efforts. By 2014, there were nearly 9,000
ministry staff members executing the policies through nine regional subcommittees and thirteen working committees (Ministry of Border Affairs, 2015). This style of administration shows that the way the Myanmar state thinks about development is in line with that of the GMS. In particular, the ADB linking places in the GMS region through infrastructure projects, with the states as primary agents of development, is what the Myanmar state has sought to do as counterinsurgency measures.

7.7. Conclusion: Violence-Development, Myanmar Nationhood, GMS Regionhood

Studying the discourses and practices of the GMS and Myanmar’s Ministry of Border Affairs illustrates that the intentions and actions of the Burmese government fit neatly with the agenda, rationalities and operational strategies of the GMS. Just as the Burmese state has attempted to link border areas as part of the ‘inherited land’ through roads and bridges in the name of development, the ADB has also attempted to link the GMS as an integrated community through transportation and communication infrastructure. The difference between Myanmar and the Bank is that the latter is not aimed at “counterinsurgency”. They both, however, aim at creating a space, in the name of development, in which lands and resources can be “freed up” (Sturgeon et al, 2013) for market forces for more ‘productive’ purposes.

The discursive construction of the GMS community is similar to the imagination of the Burmese state, in that the imagination constructs the space as a shared and inherited land that everyone is equally entitled to. In both cases, the discourse de-centres indigenous resource users, but allows ‘outsiders’ to access land and resources by reorganizing the space as a common home. The Burmese state claims sovereign territorial control over modern Burma by discrediting indigenous peoples’ historical entitlements to ancestral land and ignoring an extended armed struggle against the state for autonomy. Imagining the modern political space of Burma as ‘inherited land’, and monopolized by an ethnic Burmese majority, the state attempts to construct a new nation-state by referring to ancient Burmese kingdoms. In doing so, indigenous peoples’ rights to ancestral land have been de-centred and obscured, but ethnic Burmese rulers, ‘who are outsiders’ or internal
colonizers, have in effect self-legitimized their access to and ownership of land and resources that indigenous peoples had lived on and worked for a long time.

Just as the Burmese state has depoliticized violent conflict and rendered political conflict into a development problem, the ADB has depoliticized the GMS by rendering it into an economic program for development. By constructing the region as a ‘naturally’ bounded space with ‘a shared culture and history’, the GMS created a new discursive domain of development that redefined property relations. This discursive creation is quite similar to a violent nation-state building process in which land and resources, which indigenous peoples had cultivated, ruled and relied on for centuries, have been turned into resources for ‘outsiders’ through the construction and legitimizing of new rationalities and acts. Such rationalities and acts have enabled ‘outsiders’ to legitimize their actions, enacting centralized control over land and resources, backed by institutional support, under new spatial typologies: a transnational typology for the GMS and a national typology for Myanmar.

Countering the claim of the ADB to benefit all, the GMS Economic Cooperation Program turns out to be a new form of colonization through re-spatialization of a new development domain at the transnational scale. As in colonial regimes, resources crucial to indigenous populations have been transferred to outsiders by the following processes:

- Constructing the subregion through discourses of natural connections and a shared culture and history;
- Legitimating outside intervention through development or anti-poverty missions;
- Operationalizing development in terms of a market-based economy with private sector involvement, while maintaining the primary role of the state in decision-making;
- Treating the GMS as exclusively a realm of ‘economics’, thus avoiding the issues of violence and injustice in transforming local commons into transnational resources to be appropriated for private profit.

The ideological separation between ‘politics’ and ‘economics,’ which has been projected to national and regional spheres, respectively, has neutralized the processes through which the ADB produced the GMS as a new discursive region for development intervention, and the ways in which expert knowledge replaced local people’s self-
determination with claims from outsiders, most importantly state actors. The same process applies to the neutralization of the GMS’s own colonization accomplishments, as well as the deepening of the national state’s internal colonization of territories previously beyond its reach. Seen in this light, the GMS did not simply involve a natural economic process or a ‘peace-time’ collaboration. Rather, the GMS has been a political project that enabled the looting of territories and resources. In order to further the discussion, the next chapter illustrates how the GMS regional development programs have interacted with the forces of violence at the national scales by exploring the relations between the violent state and GMS regionalization in the context of natural resource extraction.
Chapter 8. Aiding Sovereign Violence: GMS as a Discursive Domain for Violent Resource Exchange

8.1. Introduction

Human rights groups have consistently denounced the Asian Development Bank for pursuing ill-prepared, large-scale infrastructure projects in its Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) economic integration program. Contrary to rosy publications by the Bank, rights groups have documented how the Bank’s ‘hardware’ aspect of development (i.e. infrastructure projects such as roads, bridges, dams, and so on) has negatively affected local people across the GMS region (BEWG, 2011; Guttal, 2001; Middleton 2008a,b; Ryder, 2003; SWAN, n.d.). Similarly, academics have criticized the Bank for promoting capitalist economic expansion in the region (Glassman, 2010; Krangkaew, 2004; Oehlers, 2006). Chapter 7 demonstrated that the Bank is supposed to avoid politics, but that the development projects it has been involved in are located in conflict zones. Exploring the Tasang hydropower project on the Salween River in eastern Myanmar, this chapter investigates the position and practices of the Bank in the context of natural resource extraction. The major questions explored in this chapter are: in what way does the ADB’s GMS development program interact with the forces of violence in Myanmar? In particular, how does it manage to avoid politics even though Tasang, which is part of the Mekong Power Grid, is located in the heart of a conflict zone where many thousands people have been dispossessed?

This chapter argues that the ADB interacts with the forces of violence in Myanmar by acting as the knowledge producer, providing a specific ideological framework, particularly the “need” and “possibility” for cooperation. This lends a moral justification and discursive legitimacy to the Myanmar state as it comes to provide the ‘oppressive functions’ (Poulantzas, 1972) for transnational capital’s resource plunder in the lands of ethnic minority peoples, over whose land and resources the state tries to assert sovereignty. Since capital or ‘extended capital’ in the words of Murray (1971) that always
transcends territorial national state boundaries cannot produce the necessary markets and productive social relations by itself (O’Connor, 1994), the military of Myanmar provides the ‘repressive functions’ (Poulantzas, 1972) conducive to the reproduction of capitalist social relations, including environmental enclosures and the reinforcement of private property relations. The ADB releases itself from the hook of responsibility on the basis that it only produces knowledge, so that the Bank itself should not be held accountable for violence.

The specific empirical arguments in each section of this chapter are:

(1) Investigating the Tasang hydropower dam reveals that the Bank supports the Tasang project discursively by providing knowledge-making technical assistance. Acting as a knowledge producer but not a financier or administrator, the Bank effectively releases itself from responsibility for violence in the Tasang area, since the Bank’s safeguard policies are only applicable to ADB-financed and/or administered projects. The Bank plays the role of the “knowledge broker” that constructs the ideas about the “need” and “possibilities” for cooperation for profit accumulation. This role of the Bank is shaped by the fragmented relations among the Bank and its members, posing a dilemma for the Bank, situated between Western economic sanctions against Myanmar that restricted the Bank from supporting the Government of Myanmar, and the Bank’s strategic decision not to dismiss Myanmar from the GMS. As a result, the Bank, in engaging with Myanmar, has confined itself to the producer of knowledge about the feasibility, profitability and possibilities of projects such as the Tasang dam.

(2) The working of multiple spatialities is crucial to the way the ADB interacts with the forces of violence in Myanmar. That is, the Myanmar government has not earned an income from the Tasang project because it has not been built. Instead, Myanmar has earned substantial sums from the Yadana and Yetagon gas projects and other mega-projects that are not part of the GMS master plan. Regardless of not being part of the “official” GMS master plan, the ideas of community and cooperation, articulated by the Bank, have enabled other governments and investors to plan mega-projects and trade resources, allowing the Myanmar
government to finance and sustain itself vis-à-vis ethnic armed groups from whose land the Myanmar government violently plunders resources.

This chapter is organized in the following sections. Section 8.2. explores the uneasy relations between the ADB and the Government of Myanmar to demonstrate how such relations shape the way the Bank interacts as a knowledge broker for Myanmar. Section 8.3 critically examines the ways the ADB has operated as a knowledge broker. The Bank has created knowledge about possibilities and profits so that GMS members could cooperate with each other. Section 8.4 demonstrates the need to pay attention to multiple territories, in that projects outside the GMS Master Plan have actually financed the Burmese military, and yet negotiation for those projects has still used the images and ideas of the GMS. Section 8.5 shows that the ADB’s role as knowledge producer, without involvement in financing and administering projects, releases it from social responsibility, transferring responsibility to irresponsible governments and investors.

8.2. Shaping ADB’s Involvement in Myanmar: Uneasy Relations

Scholars studying the state and state power suggest that the state is not a homogenous and internally coherent institution. Philip Abrams writes that, “The state is a unified symbol of an actual disunity” (Abrams, 2006:124). Mann similarly asserts that it is “messier and less systematic and unitary than each single theory suggests” (Mann, 2012:55). These insights can be applied to the study of GMS regionalization and governance in that they give a useful hint to pay attention to the dynamics of fragmentation, disunity and internal non-coherence among the ADB, Myanmar and other GMS countries. As the following section shows, while activist groups have accused the Bank of supporting the Burmese regime, in reality fragmentations and disunities exist within the Bank and between Myanmar and the Bank over the role of the Myanmar in the GMS. Such disunities justify, if not shape, the Bank’s policy choices towards Myanmar.
8.2.1. The ADB on Myanmar: A Troubled and Troubling Partner

The World Bank and the IMF did not engage with the Myanmar government between the late 1980s and the early 2010s. The Asian Development Bank, however, continued its relationship, most noticeable in the areas of regional cooperation. Because of other financial institutions’ sanctions, the ADB needed to limit its activities in Myanmar, and has often been criticized by the Myanmar government for not supporting it. At the same time, human rights groups have criticized the Bank for engaging with the Myanmar government, however limited in scope.

This complicated set of relationships has put the Bank in a rather difficult position. Officials from the Bank have seen the West’s economic sanctions against Myanmar as allowing China to assert greater influence on ‘resource-rich’ Myanmar vis-à-vis the resource interests of other GMS members. According to Mr. B from the ADB, the major argument of Bank officials (who are also citizens of GMS countries) in negotiating with the Bank’s western donors is that China would have monopolized Myanmar’s resources and markets, had Myanmar been completely isolated (Pers. Comm., May 2011). Dr. M, a former Bank official and a Burmese economist has also pointed out the concern of GMS countries that isolating Myanmar from the GMS would put it into “China’s hands” (Pers. Comm., June 13, 2011). A more formal justification from the Bank has been that Myanmar is a member of the Bank and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), and that Asian neighbours need to respect the non-interference principles of ASEAN.

At the operational level, Mr. A from the ADB’s Southeast Asia Division says:

ADB’s GMS program cannot be undertaken in isolation of Myanmar and hence we include Myanmar in the discussions. Myanmar government agencies in energy, transport, telecoms, environment, agriculture, customs/immigration are invited to participate in a number of technical working group meetings and in training programs so that they are aware of the development challenges the other GMS countries are facing and how they are going about addressing them. Civil society may complain but we feel that it is important to engage the government on a number of regional development issues in the hope that this will translate in some changes within the country when the officials go back (Pers. Comm., September 5, 2011).
From a planning perspective, this is a legitimate position given the changing regional political economic environment in which integration of economies along the free market line have fundamentally refashioned business, policy and operational networks, and structures in the region. In this context, activist groups’ position to isolate Myanmar until ‘genuine democratic reform takes place’ (SWAN, n.d.) demands scrutiny, as isolating Myanmar from ongoing changes would further disadvantage Myanmar in terms of policy making, decision-making, public sector management and human resource capacities towards progressive transformations.

As an example, one junior officer from Thailand who had participated in ADB energy meetings commented that she had seen Myanmar officials in meetings, as well as in trainings and events at the Mekong Institute (the main institute to train officials to manage the GMS), in which participants from Myanmar were always much older (in their late 30s and 40s) than other country participants, who were the younger generation of policy makers. This officer also commented that Myanmar officials had problems performing tasks during workshops, and that they were not able to comment on any policy decision-making issues (Pers. Comm. with Ms. Y, Bangkok, August 1, 2010). This was an issue the country had faced since the political reform in 2010, in which a fast-moving reform agenda was not matched by human capacity. The Financial Times reported, quoting an anonymous businessman: “There are probably no more than 20 to 30 competent people in this government who can do this stuff – and they’re definitely not getting any sleep” (Financial Times, 2012). The Times also quoted a foreign aid worker saying, “there are a few who know how to run things and then there’s the rest, who’ve never been trained in anything, who sit around waiting for orders, who have come up in a bureaucratic dictatorship system where initiative is punished, not rewarded. And that’s the system supposedly overseeing this incredible change.”

54 This represents a valid observation as the political culture of decision making for Myanmar officials and delegates has been to present what they are given by respective ministries. Delegates are less motivated to take initiative or act on their own even within certain boundaries to avoid being fired from their positions (confirmed by various interviews with government officials for this research.)
8.2.2. Myanmar Government on the ADB: A subject of western domination

In official speeches, the relationship between Myanmar and the ADB/GMS appear rosy as reflected in a speech by deputy tourism minister Htay Aung:

I am pleased to note that the members of GMS Tourism Sector have made some progress… within the GMS region by means of rendering assistance from ADB and our development partners…. It is a great platform for tourism cooperation between Myanmar and GMS member countries…. I do hope that this significant event will provide a great opportunity for us to take further steps to work together with member countries and our development partners… (Htay Aung, 2011).

The actual policy climate has not been as smooth as the speech indicates. The government has been frustrated that the Bank refused to provide financial assistance to Myanmar and failed to treat the country equally with other GMS countries. For instance, Myanmar’s Finance and Revenue Minister, Win Tin, charged the Bank in a ministerial meeting in 1997 with not treating the country equally:

The bank has neglected all the true facts (about Myanmar) and is still suspending its financial assistance as well as technical assistance to Myanmar…. Myanmar could have had more expeditious achievements in her economy if the aid had never been halted (Reuters, 1997).

The same struggle has continued even after 15 years. For example, U Maung, director general of a Myanmar ministry says:

We told the Bank many times to give us [financial] assistance. We also told them officially that we now have a democratic civilian government, and that we are taking further steps. But they still don't want to help us…. (Pers. Comm., May 2011, identity of the official kept confidential).

When I asked his opinion on the issue of donor governments not lending money to Myanmar because project money goes to corrupt officials and to the military, U Maung replied:

The Bank is controlled by European and Western governments; they only listen to Burmese exile groups. Information they listen to is only one-sided. Ask them, ‘have you ever discussed with the government over the use of
money [including corruption]?’ They never discuss with us, but they decide on assumptions” (Pers. Comm., May 2010).

Another senior official similarly complained that the Bank had contacted them for a study trip to Africa in late 2009 and early 2010, but that the Bank had left out Myanmar officials from the actual trip, citing a lack of funds. He also complained that ADB officials who were responsible for country consultation for establishing Regional Coordination Center for regional power trade went to other GMS countries for consultation and discussion, but told Myanmar officials to come to Thailand instead. As it was during the official holiday seasons [Thingyan water festival and Burmese New Year], it was not possible to complete administrative matters with the cabinet. The ADB team eventually came to Myanmar but did not explain the situation well (Pers. Comm., May 2011).

As for the ADB, Bank officials have said that the Myanmar military government was not a friendly government to work with. Mr. A complained that the Burmese generals controlled everything, and that it was difficult to move things ahead, as the generals were not willing to relax their grip on political and economic control (Pers. Comm., May 2011).

An officer from Thailand also highlighted the generals’ monopoly:

Burmese officials/delegates cannot contribute to dialogues. They are required to report back everything to the cabinet and all decisions have to come from the cabinet. Every time we discuss, they talk about what they brought from their government. If we suggest something, they say they would need to report back to the higher authority and that they would respond later (Interview with Thailand Ministry of Labour official, September 3, 2010).

U Naing, a senior official from the Myanmar Department of Justice, confirmed that Myanmar delegates could not say anything on policy matters beyond what had already been permitted, and that they were only allowed to decide on minor technical matters that did not have financial and policy implications, as all policy matters had to be approved by the cabinet (Pers. Comm., May 28, 2011).

Although Myanmar has been an obstacle to GMS integration, as the government of this resource-rich country had not been able to manage its economy in a more positive way, the Bank was not mandated to change the regime. This was especially true given
the GMS governments’ resorting to claims of domestic sovereignty to block criticism against their internal political (mis)management.

Obviously we cannot talk about political issues in a formal setting. Very senior officials might talk about it in closed-door meetings…. Depending on individual officials at different levels, we imply the need for political change during dinner or coffee breaks. Every time we talk, the officials said ‘the government is taking political reform’ (Pers. Comm. Vietnamese ADB official from the Southeast Asia Dept., May 29, 2011).

Moreover, given that the ADB was an intergovernmental organization, funded by member countries, it could not upset governments; therefore, it needed to avoid matters sensitive to national governments, such as human rights violations or conflicts (Interview, Dr. Katima, Director of Mekong Institute, December 12, 2011). In general, all GMS countries wanted the Bank to assist Myanmar, but the US and European members of the Bank consistently blocked the attempts (Pers. Comm., Dr. M, June 2011). Dr. M, for example, recalled his involvement in the Bank during the 1990s, when the Bank tried to help Myanmar. Since Myanmar could not be funded as a single country, a project for drug eradication was created that would cover three countries: Myanmar, Thailand and Laos. A majority of the funding, however, was to be allocated to Myanmar. With China’s support during initial discussions, the project was submitted to the board. The project was turned down when the US pressured China to disapprove the project. Dr. M also recalled that US and European board members criticized ADB delegates for making business trips to Myanmar (Pers. Comm., June 2011).

The tension between Western governments’ economic sanctions on Myanmar, and GMS countries' unwillingness to isolate Myanmar had an important implications for the way the Bank got involved in Myanmar. On the one hand, the Bank could not finance any projects in Myanmar; on the other hand, GMS members could not isolate Myanmar from the GMS program altogether. As a result, the Bank could only be involved in non-lending interventions, which made the Bank an advertising agency rather than a donor.

As Dr. M says:

The ADB only ‘identifies’ potential projects based on information supplied by each GMS member. The ADB then does the studies and gives technical assistance such as consultations, monitoring, etc. so that projects can be
developed. That potential projects being listed in the plan does not necessarily mean the ADB is financing [supporting] them” (Interview, August 2011).

That is, the Bank could claim that it did not operate in Myanmar, but GMS documents listed various projects in Myanmar that received multi-million dollars worth of Technical Assistance alongside other GMS countries. This has led activist groups to accuse the ADB of supporting the oppressive military regime. Earth Rights International, for instance, charged that “the ADB’s inclusion of Burma in the GMS program further legitimizes the military regime and sends a message of acceptance to the military junta as well as to the other governments of the Greater Mekong Subregion” (EarthRights International, n.d). In response, the ADB justified its actions, saying that the Bank only ‘identifies’ potential projects (discussed below). This is the political context in which the Bank’s involvement in Myanmar has been limited to knowledge-making assistance. Nonetheless, how indicative was this of the ADB’s involvement in Myanmar?

Richard Peet (2015), in his study of global financial capitalism, argues that institutions, in the Focauldian sense of communities of experts, produce and control knowledge. These experts are highly connected elite groups and individuals who share the same ideas, ideals, rationalities and interests. Their focus is on the creation of power centers. They do not produce commodities (i.e. physical objects) but create ideas, which circulate around clusters of dominant and connected power centres, ordering and controlling the production of physical objects. These power centres, particularly economic centres of power, use state apparatuses to pursue their economic operations.

In the context of the GMS, the ADB has been a power center in Peet’s sense, one that has focused on producing knowledge. It has created knowledge about the regional needs and possibilities for cooperation and profitability that has encouraged states, investors, and development partners to trade and share resources, without always needing the Bank’s financial, legal, or political endorsement. To elaborate more concretely on the nature of the Bank as a knowledge producer, the discussion now turns to the case study of Tasang hydropower project.
8.3. On Tasang: ADB as a knowledge broker

Chapters 1 and 4 introduced the Tasang hydropower dam as a large-scale project to be constructed by Thailand and China for electricity consumption mostly in Thailand. Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrated the prevalence of military violence and displacement in the dam areas. In addition to political and military problems, there have also been environmental concerns. Rajat Ng, the head of the Mekong Department at the Asian Development Bank, said in 2006 that:

[Tasang] didn't pass our first filter. The dam would have a profound impact on the Salween River. The project would fragment a fragile river ecosystem, reduce the flow of nutrients and water downstream and reduce the biodiversity. Deforestation is likely and would lead to soil erosion in the rainy season, which would exacerbate flood damage (Gray, 2006).

Regardless of these concerns, the Tasang project has kept on appearing on ADB documents (e.g. Caubet, 2011), while the standard response from the ADB has been that it did not support any projects in Myanmar. Tasang, however, is part of the planned Mekong Regional Power Grid, which is an extensive grid to trade power across the region (see Figure 8.1).

As a response to my question specifically about the listing of Tasang on the GMS Regional Power Interconnection plan, Mr. A from the ADB noted:

The previous Indicative Master Plan (2002) did identify Tasang as a potential project but did not recommend its development until a detailed environmental impact assessment and social impact assessments were undertaken. The purpose of the Master Plan was to identify viable projects for regional power trade but all projects being considered by the governments [or] private sector for development must meet the safeguard requirements and ensure that adequate mitigation measures and livelihood of affected are taken into consideration at the design stage of the Project (Pers. Comm., September 6, 2011)

As the Tasang project has been 'identified', it has been listed on the energy sector’s master plan. In general, projects identified in master plans for each of the nine sectors of the GMS may receive ADB technical assistance (feasibility studies, evaluation, consultation, monitoring etc.) either independently or alongside other projects as part of the package. Projects in Myanmar, however, did not receive independent technical
assistance (either as lending or non-lending interventions); they were only entitled to technical assistance on projects involving other GMS countries. As such, assistance to Myanmar could be characterized only as knowledge-making assistance - i.e. to 'identify' whether or not a project was feasible; actual development and funding of the project was left for the respective states and private investors/developers.

The language of 'identification' as used for projects like Tasang needs to be scrutinized. Michel Caubet and Thierry Lefevre, two consultants on the GMS power grid, suggested that power interconnection projects from Myanmar to China and Thailand were “very profitable and should be considered as PRIORITY” (emphasis in original) (Caubet & Lefevre, 2010). Similarly, the 2010 Master Plan ranked the projects from Myanmar, and identified the interconnection grid from Myanmar to Thailand as the priority for grid study, noting that Myanmar had huge hydro potential and that the cost was cheaper (ADB, 2010:48). As Figure 8.1 below shows, the power grid from the Tasang project was included in the Mekong power grid. Just like ADB’s official documents such as the 2010 Master plan, various consultant reports also identified projects in Myanmar as highly profitable and crucial to regional power needs (see, for example, Soluzina and Mercados, 2007; Castalia, 2008; IRM, 2008). This language kept the Tasang project high on the Myanmar government’s agenda. And yet, this process of advertising Tasang was detached from the military violence and dispossession in the Tasang area. Documents from the ADB exclusively focused on the ‘economic’ profitability and ‘technical’ feasibility of the project.
Going beyond the economic potential of the Tasang dam or its benefits to the energy sector, various ADB documents identified that resource-rich Myanmar was a source that should be utilized by resource-demanding countries such as Thailand and China, since domestic demand in Myanmar was low (e.g. IRM 2008; Castalia 2008). Technical analyses by institutions that worked closely with the Bank and its consultants reflected the position of the Myanmar government. As reported by Minister for Electric Power (1), ex-Colonel Zaw Min, the government planned to sell electricity abroad due to low internal demand (Zaw, 2012). Even without financial support from the ADB, such discourses of high profits and possibilities encouraged Myanmar and outside investors to pursue the Tasang project.

The ADB identification of the Tasang project on its GMS energy plan provided discursive support, but does not explain the sources of international financing for a violent regime for two major reasons. First, although Tasang had been identified and listed on the GMS energy strategy master plan, it had still not been built nor had it generated any substantial revenue for the Burmese regime. Second, a significantly large amount of foreign revenue for the Burmese military regime came from projects that were not part of
the GMS energy master plan at the time of this study. This is where multiple territorialities and scales become important to take into account.

8.4. Multiple Territorialities: the Oil and Gas Sector Beyond the Economic Corridor

As discussed in Chapter 5, the economic sectors that had generated the most income for the Burmese military regime since the 1990s were the oil and gas sectors, particularly from the Yadana and Yetagon gas projects. But how were these projects related to the GMS? Indeed, they were related by discourse, not by operation, but they were significant to the financial survival of the regime. For instance, Earth Rights International claimed that the export revenue from the Yadana gas project bailed out the Burmese regime that was in crisis in the late 1990s (ERI, 2008, 2010). That is, in mid-1997, the value of the Burmese currency, the kyat, lost value against the dollar by up to 80%, and the government's foreign reserves fell to about US$ 183 million. The value of the kyat continued falling, leaving the country's reserves below US$ 100 million in early 1998, compared with US$ 633 million in 1996. As a result, the regime was short of foreign reserve to import oil and other fuels. The Yadana project then came on line, from which Thailand bought 50 million dollars worth of gas in 1998, 260 million in 1999, and 550 million in 2001. This project thus effectively rescued the regime from potential financial collapse. By the end of 2007, the government was earning US$ 969 million annually from the projects, while foreign reserves had increased to 1.2 billion (ERI, 2008). These projects, therefore, were widely regarded as the single largest official source of income for the regime (ERI, 2010:6). Indeed, the income from these projects also contributed to financing violence in Myanmar. For instance, income from gas sales to Thailand enabled the Burmese government to buy 10 Russian-made MiG29 warplanes worth US$ 130 million. A down payment of US$ 30 million was made in the same week as the junta received about US$ 100 in royalties from the gas sales in 2001 (Lintner, 2001).

There are other mega projects from which the government will potentially earn foreign revenues. These projects include a US$ 29 billion Shwe Gas project (offshore gas/oil drilling and pipelines from western Myanmar to Yunnan) being developed, during the time of field work, by the Chinese state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation
(CNPC) and the Burmese military-owned Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE), with companies contracted from Korea (Dawoo International, Hyundai Heavy Industries), Myanmar (Thandar Nga Ghar, Pyidawsi), China (Hydro China) and Japan (Japan Drilling Company) (SGM, 2011). The Burmese state is supposed to receive US$ 1.8 billion annual revenue from the Shwe Gas project (900 million each from oil and gas sales to China, excluding the transport tariff) (Zhao, 2011).

Another mega project is a Davoy Deep Seaport and industrial estate project in South-western Myanmar to be developed by an Italian-Thai Development Cooperation. The project will cover 16,000 hectares (100,000 rai) of land. The investment cost is estimated to be about US$ 10.7 billion, according to a 2013 figure (The Irrawaddy, 2013).

These projects raise the question about the way the ADB is related to violence in Myanmar. Three insights are crucial here. First, the GMS has been helpful to the Burmese regime. Its regional framework has provided the Burmese regime a window to cooperate with GMS countries for revenue at a time of financial crisis when Western countries had imposed economic and financial sanctions. Planning Minister Brigadier-General David Abel told the GMS meeting in Kunming in 1996, in response to Western economic sanctions, that Myanmar was one of the original proponents of globalization and global trade liberalization. Speaking of Myanmar’s cooperation with foreign countries, the minister said, “If the West doesn’t think so, the East does think so, so we can cooperate with the East” (DPA, 1996). The GMS discourse of community has been useful in legitimating Myanmar’s cooperation with GMS countries.

Second, Myanmar has earned income not only from selling extractive resources such as oil and gas. It has also earned income from its “labour,” providing the needed “opressive function” (Poluntza, 1972) for transnational capital that needed access to its resources. To elaborate, capital has never been contained within sovereign territorial space, and the “increased mobility of capital and the decreased importance of transport

55 Apart from these projects, the government earns annual revenues from other export sectors (logging, dams, gold, jade and various natural resources), mostly to neighbouring countries. According to a Harvard University study, the Burmese government earned eight billion dollars from jade sales in 2011 from Northern Myanmar.
costs have produced a global geography of economic activities not readily captured by state-territorial representations of economic characteristics or performance" (Agnew 1994: 66). Extended capital, however, cannot produce productive conditions by itself, but requires the state to either produce these conditions or “regulate capital’s access to them” (O’Connor, 1994:166). The state ensures capital’s access to land, nature, space, infrastructure and so on (O’Connor, 1994), as well as providing guaranteed property rights by force of the law, the police and the military (Murray, 1971: 88). Seen in this light, regardless of Myanmar’s membership in the GMS as a peripheral state vis-à-vis dominant members such as Thailand and China, its military, supposed to be a highly nationalistic institution for national sovereignty, has indeed been a significant site of extraterritorial capital for plundering resources within its national domain. Land confiscation, expulsion of entire villages along pipelines, forced labour, mass killing and various military brutalities in the process of environmental enclosure and granting multinational capital access to the sites of resources mentioned above have been well documented (e.g. ERI, 2008; 2010; NCGUB, 2008; BEWG 2011).

Third, none of these multi billion dollar projects had been actively initiated or programmed by the ADB. During the time of this study, they were not part of the GMS master planning. Instead, they had been negotiated and implemented through bilateral arrangements, which were outside the ADB’s official matrix of formal institutional involvement or financing. Yet, what continuously facilitated these projects have been the discourses of GMS as a regional community needing to share resources for sustained growth (see e.g. ADB, 2005). The Bank’s construction of the GMS as a resource-sharing region has lent ideological support to GMS members to encourage them to cooperate and share resources to harness benefits. As discussed in Chapter 7, specific discourses of the GMS have been ‘community’, ‘connectivity’, and ‘competitiveness’. These discourses, as well as the broader framework of GMS as a ‘resource-sharing region’ have been extensively mainstreamed in the past two decades. It is then not surprising that countries in the region utilize these discourses, even for activities that have been implemented bilaterally.

In a sense, the GMS economic cooperation has focused on developing the so-called North-South, East-West, and Southern economic corridors, which are the
geographic strips or spatial backbones of the GMS program. Various infrastructure projects (road connection, tourism hotspots, etc.) within these spatial strips have been selectively supported by the ADB both technically and/or financially. Yet the projects that are outside these geographic strips or outside official documents have also used the ‘idea’ of a regional community to negotiate, share resources and sustain projects. For instance, Yadana/Yedagon, Shwe, and Davoy all fell outside the geographic strips and official project matrix documents until recently. Yet they have all utilized the idea of the GMS.

For example, exploration for the Yadana project started in the early 1980s and the project actually materialized in the early 1990s, when GMS was still in its early stage. Politicians, military officers, and companies from Thailand, Myanmar, as well as various other Western companies such as Total (French) and Chevron (US) negotiated for gas drilling and pipelines. Myanmar and Thailand were already trading gas in the first few years of the GMS inauguration. While country presentations mentioned these projects during ADB/GMS meetings and officials from the Ministries of Energy and Planning often praised regional cooperation, these projects were not part of the official GMS matrix/master plan, nor was the GMS the prime negotiation/implementation channel. Instead, negotiations as well as technical and financial deals and actual implementation took place largely through bilateral arrangements. Yet, the ‘idea’ of the GMS as an economic community for sharing resources and benefits was readily in the minds of state agents doing business that outside of the GMS formal planning matrix. For instance, Thailand’s Energy Minister Pichai Naripthaphan said in 2011 that Thailand would import 2 billion cubic feet of natural gas a day from Myanmar over the next 20 years. The agreement was reported following then Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra’s visit to the Myanmar capital of Nay Pyi Daw to attend the 4th GMS summit in 2011 (Naing, 2011).

Similarly, Shwe Gas was not part of the GMS energy master plan, unlike Tasang, Hutgyi, Shweli, Tapaing, and Mong Kot that were to be integrated into the GMS power interconnection grid, which has been the focus of the GMS energy sector. Davoy Deep Seaport has been mentioned lately in GMS documents, and it was discussed during the 4th GMS summit in Nay Pyi Daw. Prior negotiations and agreements, though, had been done through bilateral arrangements. This example demonstrates that there have been multiple and/or overlapping territories that are nested; they have not always been fixed,
but have been continuously restructured and redefined depending on their content and importance. In other words, the kind of knowledge and imaginations that the power centre produced has circulated across these territories, legitimating cooperation. As such, the projects that brought revenue to the Burmese regime have been part of the GMS by discourse, not by planning or operation. And yet, this has been precisely how the ADB/GMS has facilitated the international financing of a violent regime, in addition to reinforcing the sovereign status of the government through discourses of “country ownership” (Chapter 7). The ADB support of the violent Myanmar junta can be considered therefore as the lending of discursive legitimacy.

8.5. Discursive Legitimacy Without Responsibility for Safeguards

The detrimental outcome of such discursive legitimacy has been that projects in Myanmar were not accountable to ADB safeguard mechanisms. The ADB has had safeguard policies aiming to ensure necessary environmental and social assessments and that the environment and local people were protected. The recent safeguard document, approved in 2009, was called ‘Safeguard Policies Statement,’ which is a consolidated version of three earlier safeguard statements – environmental safeguards (2002), involuntary resettlement safeguards (1995), and indigenous people safeguards (1998).

Regardless of these documents, safeguards cannot be applied to the case of Tasang, as the scope of the safeguards is limited to ADB-financed or ADB-administered projects, as Article 48 defines:

This safeguard policy statement applies to all ADB-financed and/or ADB-administered sovereign and non-sovereign projects, and their components regardless of the source of financing, including investment projects funded by a loan; and/or a grant; and/or other means, such as equity and/or guarantees.... (ADB, 2009b).

These safeguards are not particularly crucial for Myanmar, as the ADB’s intervention in Myanmar is only through non-financing/lending assistance. According to
the definition above, Regional Technical Assistance (RETA), to which Myanmar is entitled, is not covered by safeguard policies, and therefore the Bank has not been institutionally accountable for what has happened in Myanmar. As Mr. A mentions:

The ADB has no control over what project the Myanmar Government plans to develop. If ADB cannot finance any project in Myanmar, then ADB has no leverage with the Government... [The ADB, therefore, can only expect] that the projects, if funded by the Government, would follow existing Government regulations on safeguards... (Pers. Comm., September 1, 2011).

As the ADB's safeguard policies were not applicable, the Bank hoped each country would responsibly implement projects: “ADB cannot force Governments to use ADB’s safeguard policies but we can help build their capacity in environment impact assessment and strategic environment assessment (SEA)” (Mr. A, Pers. Comm., September 1, 2011).

It should be highlighted here, though, that the Bank’s position on Myanmar – i.e. not financing any projects - is not entirely unique. Indeed, it is in line with the Bank’s broader approach to economic growth through greater private sector participation (see Chapter 7). In this sense, relegating financial responsibility to the private sector and respective governments has been the Bank’s broader approach. As such, the Bank’s claim that it has not been responsible for violence in Myanmar, since the Bank was not involved financially, is rather questionable.

This stipulation, however, has allowed the Bank to leave responsibility to irresponsible governments and investors/project developers for bilateral projects. For example, a Chinese representative from China Southern Power Grid said that the Myanmar government was responsible to “take care of the [Burmese] people,” as if local people affected by Chinese and Thai companies had nothing to do with Chinese companies/governments doing business in Myanmar (Pers. Comm., Siem Reap, May 2011). Likewise, violence in project areas has been seen simply as 'internal' affairs that the Myanmar government should ‘take care of’. For example, a senior officer at Electric Generation Authority of Thailand (EGAT), in response to my question about the possibility of considering in the planning process the protection of Shan displaced/migrants in Thailand, said that, “I have never heard of the displacement of people because of development projects; they are displaced because of shooting [armed conflict]” (Comm.,
Siem Reap, May 2011). This statement is ironic, as these conversations took place during a GMS official meeting in which GMS member countries were discussing projects, including the ones in Myanmar, within the regional framework; and yet violence and responsibility to protect local people were relegated to the national governments.

Even more boldly, former Democratic Prime Minister Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiv said in a TV interview, “Some industries are not suitable to be located in Thailand…. This is why they decided to set up [a coal power plant at Davoy],” in Southern Myanmar (NYT, 2010). Similarly, the deputy chairperson of the Thai Industrial Association, Tonit Sorat, told AFP that, “Myanmar [Burma] still ignores environmental issues…. Dawei [Deep Seaport project in Southern Myanmar] is the world’s solution for industry that affects the environment, heavy industry and the industry that is banned in other countries” (AFP, 2010). Particularly with respect to hydropower dams, the Burma desk officer at the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Damrong Kriakruan, told US embassy officials that Thailand planned to build dams in Myanmar, since the Thai law requiring environmental impact studies was not applicable to projects in Myanmar (US Cable 2006, 06BANGKOK113). These statements demonstrate that investing governments intentionally chose Myanmar knowing that the local people would be affected negatively by their investments. In response, they relegated responsibility to the Myanmar government. As such, both the Bank and investing governments displayed complete lack of responsibility for people that they claim to help.

8.6. Conclusion

This chapter showed that the ADB has made possible the Myanmar government’s plunder and exchange of resources to finance the military state by acting as a knowledge broker. Producing knowledge, such as the possibility to generate profits through cooperation, has encouraged and enabled countries in the GMS to trade resources, a process in which the Myanmar military provides the oppressive measures required for transnational resource plunder. The ADB’s knowledge-broker role can be considered as providing discursive legitimacy to Myanmar, since it has only provided knowledge-related assistance, but not financing or lending money.
The chapter also highlighted that there are multiple territories at work. The Myanmar government earned substantial amounts of revenue from mega projects that were outside the GMS planning matrix, and yet they utilized the idea of the GMS as a community to share resources and benefits. The ADB has not financed or administered these projects in Myanmar, and therefore cannot be held accountable for the Myanmar state’s violence. The fact that the Bank and GMS countries have refused accountability for violence in Myanmar is not an accident. These kinds of arrangements are systemic to a capitalist structure deeply rooted in the ideology of what it means to be ‘politics’ and ‘economics’, and how they are separated. As Nandita Sharma (2015) points out, armed conflicts, political struggles over governance and territories, looting land and resources, and environmental enclosures are all ideologically placed in the realm of politics, while trading resources, infrastructure projects, profit accumulation, and poverty are ideologically placed in the realm of economics. Indeed, ‘economic items’ such as resources and land are made possible by the political process of control through violence and looting. Yet the ideological rupture is introduced so as to appreciate the economic items while ignoring the ‘political process’ of control, conflict and looting. In other words, the political process that makes possible the economic items is erased from view so as to see the available resources as purely economics.

To sum up, the ADB, under the GMS regionalization program for development, interacts with forces of violence in Myanmar in complex ways, all of which are contingent on various factors with their own rationalities, contradictions and justifications. First, the Bank’s dilemma, between Western economic sanctions against Myanmar on the one hand and its unwillingness to expel Myanmar from the GMS on the other, enabled it to act as a knowledge broker. This role was not unique, however, because many other institutions were doing the same thing. More importantly, inviting the private sector to play the larger role, including financing, has been part of the Bank’s agenda. Second, in order for the GMS to continue, the Bank needed to ensure country ownership and avoid political conflicts. Again, this was not unique, because avoiding politics has been a distinguishing feature of international development efforts. Third, the Bank’s approach was that, as the knowledge broker, it could only hope that Myanmar followed its own safeguards and accountability mechanisms. This approach is problematic because it assumes that the Myanmar government’s acting violently was accidental or an unexpected error. Indeed,
this approach has been systemic in that this violence is performing its essential and structural function in the international division of labour. That the ADB avoided politics by referring to its knowledge-producer role and its own safeguard mechanisms, in tandem with ASEAN’s non-interference policy, has only drawn a curtain over the reality that the Bank has facilitated the cooperation in which Myanmar has been required to act violently.
Chapter 9. Aiding Sovereign Violence: Regional Development Regime and National Migrant Governance in Thailand

9.1. Introduction

The previous chapter illustrated the role of the ADB as the “knowledge producer” in the GMS in support of the national state. Exploring the Tasang hydropower dam project and resource extraction in Myanmar, the chapter showed that the Bank’s sponsoring of cooperation in the GMS enabled the Myanmar government to earn revenue by providing the ‘oppressive function’ for transnational capital’s access to resource sites in Myanmar. This chapter continues investigating the role of the Bank by exploring its practices in the context of human resources management to understand how the ADB has interacted with sovereign states and forces of violence in relation to displaced people.

This chapter aims to make three crucial contributions to the existing body of knowledge on regionalization and migration. First, scholarly research on the GMS has tended to focus on natural resource management, agriculture, fisheries, water resources, hydropower dams, land and so on. There has been a dearth of ethnographic research on migration in the context of the political economy of the GMS, a lack that this chapter intends to fill. Second, scholarly research has tended to focus on dispossession as a process in which people are forcefully detached from land. Going beyond such a focus, this chapter treats government agencies and quasi-state officials’ extraction of financial resources from vulnerable people as dispossession. It is dispossession because it detaches people from the wage income they depend on for their livelihoods. Third, existing studies about regulation have often focused on formal processes and practices (legal codes, government policies, institutions, formal procedures and implementation, and

56 An earlier version of this chapter was published in the Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography (See Latt, 2013)
surveillance), but have missed the dynamics of informal or extra-legal practices. Exploring the governance of ethnic Shan migrants in Thailand, my empirical discussion elaborates on the extra-legal dynamics of regulation. The central arguments of the chapter are:

1. The ADB’s encouragement of national migrant regulation has inadvertently reinforced national differences between Thais and cross-border people, an outcome that contradicts the GMS discourses of community or ‘GMS citizens’. In addition, the construction of difference has resulted not only in producing the migrants as a security threat to the sovereignty of the Thai geo-body, but has also entailed exploitative and violent governmental policies enacted in the name of managing insecurity.

2. Extra-legal relations between migrants and state/para-state agents in the form of ‘extortion’ have constituted a crucial component of migrant regulation. Such extortion is dispossession because it has detached migrants from their main source of survival: a wage income.

3. The dynamics of capitalist expansion require ‘deportable labour’ supplied by ethnic migrants who have been included in the GMS community as the most invisible, vulnerable and exploited members.

The chapter proceeds as follows. The next section explains the patterns of migration in the GMS. This is followed by an investigation of the ADB’s approach to migration, examining the Working Group on Human Resource Development and the ADB/GMS Background Paper on migration. The discussion notes the gap between the Bank’s ‘stated’ encouragement of migrant regulation at the national scale, and its ‘actual’ financial and programmatic focus on human trafficking and disease control, keeping silent on migrant rights and protections. Following that, the next section discusses exploitative formal migrant regulations in Thailand. Subsections on legal extortion, semi-legal extortion and illegal extortion detail how complicated and fluctuating official processes of migrant regulation created conditions in which state agencies and para-state agents could extract money from migrants. A conclusion then knits together what happened to migrant workers through migrant regulation implemented by the national governments but largely disconnected from ADB concerns, and how the vagaries of state regulation directly enabled informal regulation involving extortion and violence. These conditions made migrants the ‘deportable labour’ necessary for global economic growth.
9.2. Migrants in the GMS

The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Economic Cooperation Program held its fourth summit in Nay Pyi Daw, Myanmar, in December 2011. The summit confirmed that the countries in the GMS region had benefited from cooperation. Throughout the summit, speeches and media reports highlighted the spirit of regional community, integration and connectivity. Depicting the GMS as a friendly community had been the official theme of the GMS for the past two decades to facilitate regional natural resource sharing. In the context of this supposedly amicable regional community, the experiences of impoverished cross-border people who had nothing other than ‘low skilled’ labour to share with the region demand critical scrutiny, which is the focus of this chapter.

Most migration in the GMS has been the cross-border movement of poor peoples using informal migration channels (ADB, 2009c), with Thailand as the main destination country. According to most estimates, Thailand hosts three to four million irregular migrants from Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia. About 80 per cent of these migrants are from Myanmar. Up to mid-2011, only two million workers were registered with the Thai government; more than 1.5 million of these were Myanmar nationals (MMC, 2011). Apart from irregular migration, Thailand has signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia to officially recruit low-skilled labour (see Kelly, 2011; IOM, 2008).

The signing of MoUs and increased cross-border flows have been treated in GMS publications as signs of border opening. ADB accounts have claimed that post-Cold War peace has encouraged more open national borders for regional cooperation and prosperity in the GMS. Likewise, official discourses have celebrated border opening, increased cross-border economic activities and relaxation of state control (ADB, 2005).

Specific analyses show, however, that such discourses are problematic, since border opening goes hand in hand with new forms of regulation and restriction. Kusakabe’s (2009) study on women traders in the borderlands in Thailand, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia illustrates that the benefits of cross-border trade were lost to informal taxation by state officials, as border trade was subject to a regulatory regime. Walker (1999) argues that the formation of the Economic Quadrangle in the Upper Mekong
generated a new form of regulatory regime in which state officials promoted, administered and taxed cross border activities.

Careful examination of ADB activities in the GMS reveals that the Bank’s promotion of regionalization has not been about ‘erasing’ borders altogether, but about ‘easing’ border-crossing by facilitating transport and communication networks and by standardizing regional border administration (see ADB, 2005). Likewise, GMS programs have been planned exclusively by state officials, as the ADB has ensured that ‘the GMS countries have strong ownership of the Program’ (see Chapter 7).

The state presence has been most visible in the context of migration. Researchers studying migration and border politics have shown that regulation of mobility is not being relaxed. While arrangements have eased mobility for professionals and ‘low risk’ travellers (e.g. the NEXUS program in North America, Schengen visa in Europe, and planned ASEAN visa in Southeast Asia), mobility of refugees and unskilled migrants has been restricted (Sparke, 2006; Zaiotti, 2011; Curly & Wong 2008). In the Mekong region, state regulation in the context of regional cooperation has been manifested in what High (2008) calls ‘the mobility of the marginal’; her study finds that the new cooperation between Thailand and Laos worked to reduce “undocumented” migration, trafficking and movement of insurgency groups’. Arnold and Pickles’ work (2011) on factory workers in Mae Sod on the Thailand-Myanmar border also illustrates tight control over ‘illegal’ immigration.

In Thailand, there are two major acts governing immigration: The Immigration Act (1979) and The Foreign Employment Act (1978). Since 1992, Thailand has regularized cross-border migrants from Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia through annual ad hoc cabinet decisions (Supang & Ratchada, 2010). Since then, Thailand has treated migration as if it can be ‘turned on and off at will’, to borrow the phrase from Marfleet (2006: 168). This switch has often produced so-called ‘illegal’ immigrants. For instance, the 1999 migrant registration allowed migrants to work only in 37 provinces, down from 54 in 1998 (Martin, 2004:19). The revised regulation generated new undocumented migrants who had registered outside these 37 provinces one year earlier (Martin, 2004). Such ad hoc practices continued into the 2000s, sustaining what de Genova (2002) calls the ‘legal production of migrant illegality’, in which legal processes include migrants by transforming
them into illegal subjects. As Coutin (1998) claims, migrant restriction generates 'the space of non-existence' in which the migrants are physically present, but legally and socially excluded (see comparative studies in Southeast Asia, Kelly, 2002).

State regulation involves more than legal processes; it is complicated by practices of surveillance (Foucault, 1995). Studying northern Thailand provinces, Pongsawat (2007) and Thant (2010) illustrated Thailand's citizenship regime in which minority groups and migrants have been classified into different categories. They have been issued various types of ‘hill tribe’ and ‘alien’ identity cards. Travellers within Thailand must present identification cards at various police checkpoints along the highways. At the checkpoints, they have often received ill treatment from officials. Similarly, Aung (2010) describes the security establishment in the border town of Mae Sod. Aung includes measures such as health mechanisms (hospitals, medical centres), labour mechanisms (Ministry of Labour, employment department), human security mechanisms (Ministry of Social Development and Human Security), and national security mechanisms (Army, Police, Immigration), which have all kept surveillance on migrant labourers.

Migrant restriction, however, is not really to restrict migration itself, but to restrict migrants' rights in the competitive global capitalist economy, which requires disposable labour (Sharma, 2006). Because of the need to sustain a cheap and compliant workforce, governments encourage the entry of irregular migrants whose vulnerable position means they can both be exploited more than legal migrants and deported at any time (Marfleet, 2006). As de Genova (2000) argues, it is not deportation per se, but ‘deportability’ that matters. Deportability makes migrants vulnerable and forces them to bear exploitation. The point here is not that border opening should be equated to an unregulated flow of migration, but to note that opening is accompanied by new sets of regulation that entail more vulnerability for migrants.

9.3. Migration as the ADB sees it

The ADB has recognized the importance of migrant labour to economic growth. The ADB background paper prepared for the fourth GMS Dialogue in Beijing in May 2009 indicated that ‘Labor migration enables the receiving countries to overcome internal labor
shortages, which helps them to sustain economic growth and competitiveness’ (ADB, 2009c: 8). This background paper (hereafter the Paper) appeared to be a populist document pointing out the lack of rights and protection and the livelihood insecurity faced by unskilled migrants. Yet, the Paper’s broader aim was to control labour mobility. Two points from the Paper are worth highlighting. First, it described unregulated migration as potentially problematic:

...irregular migration makes it more difficult for governments to regulate labor markets and harness the benefits of migration... [Existing] laissez-faire policies may appeal to the private sector that focuses on short-term gains; however, when viewed from the perspective of the long-term investor, such an approach to migration management is passive and will lead to increasing political and social costs... (ADB, 2009c: 7).

Second, it rationalized regulation as necessary to regional integration:

...the absence of rigorous regulation means that the labor market is not truly integrated. Labor migration occurs mostly in an unregulated environment – meaning that there is little control over how it contributes, or detracts from the labor market, particularly in the medium and long term. Despite the importance of regional labor migration for economic competitiveness and growth, developments in this area lag behind other regional integration initiatives, particularly in the flow of goods and services (ADB, 2009c: 26).

The Paper argued that unregulated migration undermined sustainable competitive growth, potentially causing political and social costs. The Paper called for effective management of migration on the basis that ‘the subregion could benefit much more from international migration if the flows become more regulated and better managed’ (ADB, 2009c: 23). The irony here is that while the conventional process of regional integration requires freer movement of capital, goods and services (i.e. deregulation), integration of labour mobility requires ‘rigorous’ regulation.

The Paper recommended providing more protection to migrant workers, ‘with demonstrated advantages to registered (i.e. ‘legal’) migrants as an incentive to register’ (ADB, 2009c: 27). In practice, this has discriminated against undocumented migrants. The Paper was pro-regularization without addressing (1) the complex dynamics of undocumented migrants whose political and financial constraints had forced them to remain undocumented, and (2) the violence enacted upon them for being undocumented.
The Paper was in line with the broader ADB approach towards human resource management, reflected in the Working Group on Human Resource Development (WGHRD) of the GMS.

Human Resource Development (HRD) is one of 11 sectors of the GMS program that has approached migration in terms of managing risks. To the ADB/GMS, these dangers have largely been concerned with human trafficking and communicable diseases. The WGHRD, formed in 1995, has paid disproportionate attention to anti-human trafficking and disease control rather than to social protection and skill development of cross-border migrants. For example, the Working Group’s five strategic thrusts in the plan of action are education and skills development, safe labour migration, disease control, social development and strengthening institutional links. According to the HRD strategic framework (2009-12), funding for safe labour migration was less than USD 1 million, far less than for disease control (USD 96.7 million) and anti-human trafficking (USD 30.4 million). Even then, projects for safe labour migration were not directed at migrants, but to ‘study’ topics such as the relationship between economy, migration and demographic change (ADB, 2009d: 12).

The GMS has not completely ignored protection for migrants in terms of wage-related security (wages, accident compensation), health-related security (access to medical services) and protection from physical violence. Indeed, GMS country delegates raised concerns over labour protection and welfare during meetings, but security aspects – human trafficking and communicable diseases – often dominated the discussion. The Bank’s approach to migration has not been to develop livelihood opportunities for the poor, but to focus on managing risks that are perceived to be undermining the Bank’s overall free market agenda (Rosser, 2009).

Before discussing national migrant regulation, it is necessary to mention that the processes and outcomes of migrant regulation in Thailand have been disconnected from what the ADB has done at the regional level. One reason is that the Bank needs to avoid certain migrant issues (rights, protection, legal status) about which member governments are sensitive. All governments can cooperate on human trafficking and disease control. The Bank has supported regulating ‘illegal’ immigration, thought to be the cause of
trafficking. Yet, given that the member states block external intervention in the name of state sovereignty, the Bank has been unable to take a stance on the unforeseen consequences of national regulations. Thus, the Bank has ended up encouraging regulation but without any ability to shape it, or to have officials at the regional level responsible for migrant issues.

The tenth WGHRD meeting, held in Vientiane in May 2011, was attended by more than 80 delegates – out of which 10 were from Thailand – from GMS countries, international institutions and donor organizations. Yet, no delegate from Thailand was responsible for protection and rights of migrant workers (other than trafficking and health). A delegate representing Thailand International Development Cooperation Agency (TICA) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs suggested that I consult the Ministry of Labour, as the migrant issue was ‘quite technical and is concerned with laws’. Yet, no official from the Ministry of Labour responsible for cross-border labourers was present at the meeting. Moreover, Thailand’s national contact person for Labour and Migration was in charge of skill development, but her specialization was not migration. Similarly the ADB has not appointed officials for migrant protection. For example, the working group webpage listed Mr. David Ablett (education specialist) and Ms. Uzma Hoque (social development specialist) as the ADB/GMS’s contact persons for labour and migration respectively. Mr Ablett told me that he was not responsible for labour migration and protection but skill development, and Ms. Hoque responded that she was not in charge of migration issues. This points to the gap between the management of migration at the GMS level and the regulation of cross-border migration within national domains. Consequently, processes of regulation and outcomes in Thailand discussed below appear somewhat unconnected to the discussion on the ADB above. The issue is precisely that the ADB approach to managing migration does not deal with protecting migrants. Migrants have only been subject to formal and informal forms of regulation within each country. Before turning to national regulation, it is important to unsettle the distinction between ‘national’ and ‘regional’.
9.4. Problematizing ‘National’ and ‘Regional’: National is Transnational, and Vice Versa

Before proceeding to the regulation of migration at the ‘national level’, it is important to problematize the distinction between ‘regional’ and ‘national’. Conceptualizations such as “conflict in Myanmar”, “displacement in Myanmar”, and “migration in Thailand” seem to have been readily accepted discourses in both the academic literature and NGO reports. But how are these processes really national? This section will shed light on the complicated realities of how national is transnational, and vice versa.

Previous chapters have demonstrated that violent processes in the Shan State that entailed displacement of people have the fingerprints of many actors (military personnel, politicians, business people) beyond Burma and included those from Thailand and other GMS countries. Moreover, the kinds of conditions (poverty and legal precariousness) which made Shan migrants in Thailand vulnerable and therefore subject to exploitation and violence were prevalent not only in Burma, but also throughout the long and unsettling journey “to” and “within” Thailand as they moved from one place to another.

To elaborate, in June 2011, we visited a new construction project called “Star Avenue 2”, a modern commercial building next to Chiang Mai City’s Arcade central bus station. The expansion of the bus station was a response to the growing number of tourists to the city, from within and beyond Thailand. Just behind the construction site was a slum of about twenty temporary huts for Shan families who were working on the Avenue’s construction. One of the huts we visited had a king size mattress lying on the bamboo floor. That was the entire space for a family of three: the reality for “Star Avenue” builders. We sat literally at the door to talk to the family sitting across the mattress in the hut. By December 2011, the building was almost entirely finished and the workers moved to another construction site, together with their “mobile slum”- the typical landscape of migrant residents I visited between 2010 and 2011 for this research.

Regardless of where they worked or how long they had been in Thailand, the common experiences of Shan migrants were legal precariousness, labour exploitation, police violence, public discrimination, and general poverty. Such migrant experiences,
however, were portrayed in both popular and academic discourses as ‘better’ than the violence they had experienced in Myanmar. Dr. Suwanna Satha-anand from Chulalongkorn University writes:

The story of Shan women preferring to leave for Thailand to work in the sex industry for payment rather than serving SLORC [State Law and Order Restoration Council] soldiers without payment is common throughout Shan state and other ethnic states in Burma. Like their Thai sisters, these Shan women regularly send money home to help their family members escape from forced labor and portering by the SLORC (1999: 203).

This is an example of what I call the ‘Good Thailand, Bad Neighbours’ narrative. Such a narrative influences policy choices because they portray the migrants as liking to be in Thailand better than somewhere else, or in some cases taking advantage of the ‘good-ness’ in Thailand. This narrative therefore deserves critical scrutiny. Instead of seeing political violence in Myanmar and migrants’ opportunities and challenges in Thailand as separate incidents divided by national borders, with one country better than the other, it is important to conceptualize processes, events and outcomes through a transnational lens to show that they mutually constitute the specific forms of social relations in which violence, displacement, and regulation are entangled in complex ways.

A possible arena to conceptualize migration in a transnational perspective is to look at multiple processes – not only the cause of displacement in the ‘source’ country or experiences in the ‘destination’ country, but also the experiences of migrants throughout their unsettling long journey. Studying multiple conditions and unsettling ‘the end points’ of migrants shows that not only the violence in Myanmar but also exploitation en route ‘to’, and ‘from’ one destination to another in Thailand, shape their experiences of constant dispossession as resources are depleted throughout the journey.

Conditions that have rendered Shan migrants vulnerable in Thailand began with violence in the Shan State that not only destroyed the villagers’ economic basis for survival, as illustrated by Kham village in Chapter 5, but also deprived soon-to-be-migrants of the financial resources that would be essential for their journey to Thailand. Given that the vast majority of Shan have migrated to Thailand ‘illegally,’ which required avoiding government authorities, they entered clandestine spaces as soon as they decided to leave. Seen in this light, they had already entered the new ‘alien’ zone of vulnerability at
the moment they decided to depart. In the words of Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1991:18), they are “not foreigner[s], yet foreign”. Entangled with the lack of financial resources to pay for safe travel channels, their clandestine journey meant passing through territories in which their mobility was governed by terror and exploitation.

9.4.1. From the village to somewhere: broke and indebted before going anywhere

In the mainstream literature on migration, the patterns and movements of people are often delineated as from one point to another (see the critique in Samers). Yet, the migrants’ destination is often an open-ended question as they struggle against hardship, and keep moving from place and place.

Sai Hat, a farmer in his late forties, was a farm labourer in Fang district in Chiang Mai province during the time of this study. In 1996, his village in the Shan State had been forced to relocate to the town of Kun Hein, where he lived for five years before migrating to Thailand. During relocation, the Burmese soldiers burned down his house and killed all nine cows he owned. As he was given only three days to leave his village, he could only bring with him basic items and some money. This is the typical story told by many research participants, showing that the villagers lost everything: land, livestock, money, homes, all their possessions, and sometimes even their families. Moreover, the story of Sai Nyo, a close friend of Sai Hat from the same village, who was also working as a farm labourer in Fang, further illustrates that many migrants came to Thailand empty-handed. Sai Nyo left his village secretly, only telling people that he was just visiting another village. In order not to attract any attention, he left empty-handed - not even a bag.

As they travelled, they moved through clandestine territories risking their lives and further losses. Nang Non’s experience illustrates the point. In 1996, when people in her village heard that Burmese soldiers were burning down villages and killing people on the way towards them, they all ran away. Nang Non’s family hid on an island in the Ping River (tributary of the Salween) for fifteen days. As there was nothing to eat for her family with four children, they joined a group of 20 villagers to continue their journey to the Thailand/Burma border. They took a truck from the island to Na Kaung Mo, a small town in the Shan State closer to the border. The trip had already cost the family all the money and food they
had, forcing them to survive on food donated by sympathetic villagers from Na Kaung Mo. From Na Kaung Mo, they walked one day and one night to Pa He, a small town on the Thai side of the border. Nang Non, carrying her three-year old child, and her husband carrying their elder child, walked an entire rainy night through the dark jungle, hiding and avoiding Burmese and Thai soldiers. The next morning, the family arrived in Pa He, where their relatives lent them money to pay for the travel expenses from Na Kaung Mo to Pa He (1,600 baht or US$ 53). Hiding at their motorbike driver’s home for a while, they managed to find a farmhouse, where they were also hired as wage labourers. The husband earned 80 baht a day (US$ 2.5), and the wife earned 60 baht (US$ 2). At one point, when the family had 8 baht (US$ 0.20), frog pickers robbed all the money in one night. The family was thus totally broke, but the debt had not been paid off. The family worked in Pa He for three years before moving to another village, hoping to earn a better income. An employer trying to force them to apply for migrant registration papers (discussed below) caused them to continue their journey to Fang. The most tragic loss of the family was their two children, who were now suffering from mental illness.

Nang Non’s experience has been a common pattern of Shan migration since the mid-1990s. A significant number of migrants worked in Fang earning 80 to 100 baht a day (US $2 to $4). Newcomers from my research sample earned as little as 30 baht (US$ 1) a day, working mostly as farm labourers in orange orchards before moving to Chiang Mai to seek higher wages. While living in small villages, a few migrants managed to acquire Thai hill tribe cards, with which they could travel to Chiang Mai. A vast majority of migrants, however, worked in Fang without any identity card, risking police arrest, extortion and deportation (various interviews, 2010-2011). Those who moved to Chiang Mai without any identity card endured risks including rape by the police and extortion from government officials (discussed below). Even more tragic were those who either died, were arrested and abused by the police and border patrol at highway check points, were sold to the sex industry by traffickers, or killed by employers or police en route (see HRW, 2010) (see Section 9.6.1 for extortion by the Thai government and government officials).

The point to highlight here is that the experiences of Sai Hat, Sai Nyo, and Nang Non illustrate that people had been stripped of all their belongings (land, houses, livestock, money) – not only in the Shan State, but also throughout the journey ‘to’ and within
Thailand. They were made poor, vulnerable and deprived of the basic materials necessary to forge a stable livelihood – not by one incident or in one country, but throughout the chain of events as they moved. Lacking enough money and a secure legal status, they were trapped in social conditions in which they became subjects of exploitation.

Seen in this light, dividing “national” or “regional” does not sit well with reality, since the everyday experiences of the Shan occurred in the web of events and processes that had both national and transnational contexts. Thus, conceptualizing migration in the ‘national’ perspective is problematic in the first place. Such conceptualization, however, still informs policy choices as discussed below.

9.5. Securitization of Migration in Thailand

9.5.1. Discourses of Securitization

Chapter 5 introduced the concept of securitization in which Shan villagers in Myanmar were framed as an urgent security threat to the Burmese government. Seeing them as security risks who supported armed groups, the governmental practice was to ‘manage’ Shan in order to contain threats. The following section similarly utilizes the concept of securitization to explore the way Thailand manages Shan migrant workers in the name of managing insecurity, in which the narrative of “Good Thailand, Bad Neighbours” is implicated. This narrative creates a sense of “uprooted” and “troubled” people from elsewhere coming to Thailand to disrupt the “national order of things” (Malkki, 2008). As in many migrant-receiving countries, Thailand's migrant policies have been anchored in the discourses and practices of security that see migration as a threat. Framing migration in security terms, managing migration is to manage the perceived threat. Thailand's past and present migrant legalization/registration programs have been to enumerate and control the mobility of migrants, while law enforcement officers have been enjoined to "execute the laws of the nation to prevent crimes associated with illegal immigration" (Interview with Police Lieutenant Colonel Witoon, July 2010). Although statistical numbers confirming the rate of crime incidents by migrants were not clear to the three police officials who participated in this research, all three officials shared the
assumption that illegal migrants (and refugees), caused security threats to Thailand (homicide, stealing, fighting, human and drug trafficking, and bringing diseases).

Panitan Wattanaygorn, a government spokesman, said that the influx of migrants “is very critical” and “the National Security Council sees this [the migrant issue] as a major concern for Thai security” (VOA, 2010). Such anxiety has been manifested in the fear of losing territory as if foreign bodies, embodying diseases and crimes, were invading Thailand. For instance, a 2009 Bangkok Post article entitled “Influx of Burmese migrants worries army,” quoted Lt Gen Nipat Thonglek, Chief of Army Border Affairs, as saying:

The burden [of migrant workers] is endless. We also have 3,000 babies born to migrant parents here [Ranong, Southern Thailand]… What should we do with those children 10 years from now? (Laohong and Kasam, 2009).

Similarly, a senior official from the Ministry of Labour says:

There are lots of illegal migrants in Mahachai [outside Bangkok]. About 80% of people there are Burmese. They speak Thai, but we don’t speak Burmese. So, they know what we talk, but we don’t know what they are talking (Interview, 1 September 2011).

Another senior officer from the Ministry of Labour said:

If you allow migrants to run in the elections, they will surely win [because of a large number of voters] (Interview, 10 October 2011).

Such discourses point to the fact that migrants are officially thought of as causing security problems and threats to the Thai nation. They are also a reflection of Thai officials’ anxiety over the loss of Thai territory and sovereignty to non-Thai. As Coutin (1998) points out, it is not only the state that has created the image of migrants as a problem. There are various other non-state actors who have contributed to the discursive formation of migrants as encroaching on sovereignty and posing a threat to the nation. The Chiang Mai Mail, for example, was a local media outlet that played a crucial role. Typical reporting looked like the following:

All 82 [arrested migrants] have been charged with entering the country illegally and were detained at Chiang Saen Police station for further investigation, as police believe that some may be responsible for bag snatching and theft in Thailand (The Chiang Mai Mail, 2010).
The quote says, “may be responsible”, but it does not provide any evidence. Similarly, in August 2011, the Chiang Mai Mail carried a story in which two different issues were put together. The title of the report was, “Missing Chiang Rai man found in Cholpratan Canal” and the second title “Burmese children forced to beg rescued in Chiang Mai”. Although the mentally ill man was believed to have fallen into the canal by accident, the construction of the news report portrayed the case as if it were linked to the “Burmese captor” of two children.

Intriguingly, academics, research institutions, and health professionals one way or another have contributed to constructing migrants as a threat to national security. Some of the arguments have explicitly portrayed how refugees and migrant workers have reintroduced diseases to Thailand that had been ‘entirely eradicated’. A medical doctor, Withaya Huanok, wrote an article entitled, “Thailand under threat: how Burma’s dams could spread diseases”, that the dams in Burma had re-introduced elephantiasis to Thailand (Withaya, 2009). The author saw the dams exclusively as “Burma’s dams”, the root cause of the problem, as if Thailand were not developing the projects, a story that is contradicted by the history of dam projects discussed in previous chapters. Similarly, a common theme of public health research and campaigns has concerned how political conflicts in Burma had transmitted HIV, tuberculosis and various communicable diseases to Thailand via displaced people. For instance, a research paper from Mahidol University explicitly states:

Malaria, along with acute diarrhea and tuberculosis, are on the rise among migrant workers and have become once again a serious health threat to Thai citizens (Caoutte, 2000-2001:29).

Human rights NGOs have been no different. Burma Issues, an NGO focusing on ethnic minority rights aiming to educate and empower ethnic grassroots communities, published a report in 2008 called “Living Ghosts”. The title of the report refers to displaced ethnic Karenni:

As these populations cross international boundaries they bring with them diseases and illness that can be transferred to the local people. Populations along Burma’s borders with Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand are susceptible to HIV/AIDS, drug resistant malaria and drug resistant tuberculosis that are coming from Burma, along with the people.
Additionally, sick populations that have migrated to a new country add stress on the national health care system and non-governmental organisations that provide medical services – stretching their already thin resources further (Burma Issues, 2008: 90).

In addition, various publications by both academics and rights groups almost exclusively reduced the effects of migrant workers to social impacts such as threats to community security, referring to street children, diseases, and criminal activities. Topics such as economic contributions and transnational cultural linkages appeared very seldom compared to problems related to migrants. Common issues addressed included street children, physical and mental health, lack of education and family planning, exploitation, human trafficking, and the threat to communities. I acknowledge that the tactic in these studies has been to persuade the government of Thailand to protect migrants and refugees by emphasizing how potentially threatening migrants and displaced people were to state security. Yet, an over-emphasis on the 'problems,' which dovetail with the national typology, if not always the nationalist approach, have ended up contributing to the image of migrants as ‘illegal’, chaotic and threats to people, nation and sovereignty.

Discourses that enframed migrants as threatening the nation and sovereignty have not been accidental or unique to Thailand. Instead, the very ideology of legitimacy, the ruling elite’s sovereign claims over territory, people and resources, depends on its ability to control the membership of the nation. To elaborate, the liberal notion of the rulers’ rights to govern rests on the promise to protect the nation. Historically, the liberal notion of sovereignty emerged out of the bourgeoisie’s struggle against imperial sovereignty. In an attempt to replace imperial sovereign claims, liberal theorists invented the notion of nationalized sovereignty, giving those who were ruled the illusion that the rulers exercised sovereignty in the name of the nation and for its protection. Sharma (2015:42) explains:

Such projects hinged on there existing a “nation” that a national sovereign would then be ideologically constructed to democratically “represent”. But because prior human collectivities did not imagine themselves to be nations, nations had to be actively constructed. As with all forms of domination, the constructedness of these nations, - and the constructedness of the right of the national sovereign to govern – had to be obscured so as to naturalize power.
Through time, the nationalist ideology transformed communities into nations and land into national territory. The right to belong to these national territories thus became contingent on membership criteria, over which the ruling class was to police to exercise sovereign power. Sharma (2015) argues, “In articulations of “naturally” existing ties of certain people to certain lands, control over national membership becomes a key terrain in which claims for sovereignty are made”. Policing and maintaining the social relations of exclusion, or exercising “the power of exclusion” (Hall, Hirsch, & Li, 2011), has been the perennial act of nationalist sovereign claims. In Thailand, one group of people subjected to the state's exercise of the power of exclusion has been migrant workers, whose exclusion has been perpetuated through laws and bureaucratic practices – all in the name of managing threats.

9.5.2. Practices of Securitization

Thailand signed an MoU with Myanmar in 2003 on cooperation in the employment of migrant workers. This MoU established general agreements on procedures related to labour recruitment, repatriation and protection. The most significant outcome forced migrants to acquire temporary passports from their home countries and visas from destination countries. This entailed the Thai state to verify the nationality of 'illegal' workers in Thailand, a process known as 'Nationality Verification' (NV).

The purpose of NV was rooted in security thinking. Mr Nana Rattanaruth from the Ministry of Labour explained that one reason for implementing NV was to ensure that a migrant was really the person he/she claimed to be. Moreover, the sending governments were required to identify migrants' origin and permanent addresses. Otherwise, the Thai government could not trace a migrant who committed a crime and escaped. NV also ensured that migrants returned to their 'permanent address' after the completion of employment terms, a maximum of four years.

These anxieties about insecurity, caused ostensibly by the possibility of migrants not returning home, have resulted in the militarization of treatment of migrant workers. For instance, former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva issued Order 125/2553 in June 2010 titled 'Establishment of a Special Centre to Suppress, Arrest and Prosecute Alien Workers Who
Are Working Underground, an extension of Cabinet Resolution (19 January 2010) providing ‘the authority for prosecution of alien workers who did not enter into the NV process and who hence were working underground…’. Order 125/2553 authorizes establishment of an operation centre at the Employment Department in the Ministry of Labour. A committee to administer the centre was to comprise commanders of the Royal Thai Police Force, the army, the navy, immigration, the Police General and high-ranking officials responsible for migrant workers. The composition of the committee suggests the militarization of the regulation of migration.

Even before this order was signed, there were incidents of violent suppression. In late 2008, the Thai navy set 992 ethnic Rohingyas from western Myanmar adrift in the Andaman Sea in boats without engines and food, costing the lives of 550 people (Al Jazeera, 2009). Rohingyas are Muslim minority refugees from western Myanmar who have been fleeing to Thailand in the recent years. Many of them end up surviving as 'illegal immigrants' in Thailand's cities. Similarly in 2008, 54 migrants died of suffocation as they travelled secretly to southern Thailand. During the first six months of 2010, a total of 23 migrants died from incidents related to police chases.

Regardless of such human costs, the Thai government has insisted on strict control. Mr. Supat Gukun, director general of the Employment Department said, ‘We will have to arrest and deport those alien workers who have not kept in line with prescribed procedures’ (Inter Press Service, 2010). Migrant workers must have their nationality verified in order to stay and work legally in Thailand. Without it, they are denied protection even in life threatening conditions. For instance, Mr Gukun said, in the context of 13 migrants who lost their lives to a police chase in Southern Thailand in May 2010, ‘If they come legally, we welcome them and protect them the same as local people…. If we're talking about migrant workers, that means they are here working through legal channels. If they cross borders and find themselves a job, they're illegal' (Bangkok Post, 2010). These violent measures underscored that there was no place for illegal migrants in the friendly 'community' of an integrated GMS.

To elaborate, the ADB publication ‘Connecting Nations, Linking People’ (2005) claimed that, as indicated in an earlier chapter:
Although the PPP [Phnom Penh Plan for Development Management program] alumni come from the six countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), they call themselves “GMS citizens,” an apt reference to the growing community of Mekong leaders and managers who make up the critical mass of change agents that the PPP has established… (2005: 29).

This reference to ‘GMS citizens’ runs counter to Mr Gukun saying that migrants who did not verify their nationality would not be welcomed and protected. It was even more telling when Abhisit Vejjajiva issued Order 125/2553 to suppress migrants just two months after the First Mekong River Commission Summit, where he had stated that the Mekong River should not be a division, but a river that bridges traditions, cultures and a common striving for progress (MRC, 2010). The purpose of the discussion here is not to define what the notion of ‘community’ is or what it should be, but to highlight that the rosy community often mentioned by the Bank and government officials was not relevant to poor migrants in the region.

Due to NGO opposition, Order 123/2554 was relaxed but it has not been revoked completely. Although the order did not operate as intended, it still created possibilities and even acceptability for violence against migrant workers. For example, two ethnic Kayah migrants in Chiang Mai were brutally attacked by their employer’s son in December 2010. One of them died and the other, named Taw Law, survived. The attack left Taw Law with his intestine outside his body. Once Taw Law was discharged from the hospital, he was taken to Samkhamphan district police office outside Chiang Mai city, where he spent one night for ‘investigation’ before he could fully recover. He was then transferred to the Chiang Mai Immigration Detention Centre where he spent 10 to 15 days in jail. Instead of being protected, he was confined at the Chiang Mai immigration department because he was not staying at the place identified on his document. Taw Law was registered yet ‘illegal’: a systemic failure that criminalized the victim of violence (discussed below). Chiang Mai immigration had listed him for deportation to Myanmar, but a Burmese community organization helped him stay in Chiang Mai by bribing the police. Taw Law did not receive any compensation from his employer or the government, but he funded his medical treatment by volunteering at a Canadian NGO in northern Thailand. Thailand has had social security schemes for migrant workers in the Workmen’s Compensation Act (1994), the Social Security Act (1990) as well as the Social Security Fund. Their application for
migrants, however, has been extremely limited due to administrative and legal hurdles, and the complicated migrant legalization programs. Such conditions make migrants vulnerable, allowing the authorities to exploit the migrants’ vulnerability and deportability, as discussed below.

9.6. State regulation and extortion

According to Coutin (1998: 59), ‘migrations do not just happen; they are produced. And migrations do not involve just any possible combination of countries; they are patterned’. This patterning is due in part to the global capitalist system that demands controllable and disposable cheap labour in geographically specific ways. As a mode of production with downward pressure on prices, the global economic model demands productive and competitive (read: exploitable) labour, which requires a lessening of adherence to the law and obligation to the workers’ welfare. For this reason, the relationship between the economy and migrant regulation either at the national or global level is such that the regulatory regimes act on behalf of capitalist interests, according to narratives of migrant exploitation (Boucher, 2008: 1469). These narratives sit well with examples of labour exploitation worldwide (Sharma, 2006; Arnold and Pickles, 2011). Contributing to these narratives, my empirical study draws attention to the fact that state regulation has not simply been to enable employers to exploit migrant labour; in addition, state and para-state agents have been able to extract financial resources from the migrants. Such extraction can be referred to as ‘extortion’. The line between state regulation and the extortion it enables has been very thin. The erratic and complex nature of state migrant regulation has all but ensured that state and para-state actors would be able to further exploit migrants.

9.6.1. Legal extortion

One reason the Paper advocated regulating mobility was that undocumented migrants did not pay taxes. It claimed that, ‘The economic costs involved are also higher with irregular migrants because they do not contribute to the social system through income taxes’ (ADB, 2009c: 23). This claim was unimaginative at best, and wrong at worst, since migrants have paid the government various fees as a result of the restrictive legalization
policy under NV, plus various informal charges to police and local officials, as the following case studies illustrate.

**Table 9-1. Survey Data: Migrants and registration status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registration status</th>
<th>Number of migrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hill tribe cards</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant registration/ Work permit/ Passport (Either or/ both)</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not currently registered</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer from migrants</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>130</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Migrant registration alone was not sufficient; they needed a work permit to work in Thailand. Migrants had to apply for a passport before a specific deadline. Missing any of these steps rendered them ‘illegal’.

Prior to NV, under MoUs, Thailand had instituted annual migrant registration beginning in 1992 (except 1994 and 1995). Given that Thailand had been unable to count the exact number of ‘aliens’ in the country, migrant registration aimed at tracking migrant workers. Annual registration cost migrant workers from a minimum 2500 THB (USD 80) to a maximum 7800 THB (USD 260) in 2006 (MMN, n.d.). Given that registration was individual and not household-based, every member of the family was required to spend that amount of money every time he/she registered or renewed registration. Although these registrations were supposed to guarantee the minimum wage and rights to protection, migrants’ experiences were different. Even more costly, perhaps, were the fees associated with the latest legalization scheme under the MoU. Each migrant was required to bear fees for two different phases.

First, they needed to have registered with the government for temporary stay, which cost 3800 THB (USD 130). The temporary stay fee was already very high for migrant workers whose monthly income was around 2000–3000 THB (USD 65–100) for farm workers, and 4000–6000 THB (USD 135–200) for domestic and construction workers. After spending most of their income on living expenses, the fees became a challenge, especially if a migrant had dependents including elderly parents and a pregnant wife.
This fee was not the only one, however. Since migrants were tied to their (1) employer, (2) place of work, and (3) place of residence, they had to report any changes to respective offices by paying 1000 THB (about USD 35) for each change per person. In Chiang Mai City, for example, most migrant workers were in the construction sector and lived next to the construction site. Once the building was finished in a few months, they moved to another construction site. Most migrants did not officially update their place of residence unless their employers paid the fee or bribed the police. If the police came to check, workers might be charged from 500 to 2000 THB (USD 17–65), or even 5000 THB (USD 165).

Once temporary stay registration was completed, migrants were required to go through NV towards getting temporary passports and visas. Unlike temporary stay registration, NV had both political and financial constraints. Given that the vast majority of ethnic migrants (70.2 per cent out of 85 respondents) had come to Thailand to escape state violence in Myanmar, submitting biographic data to the Myanmar government was politically challenging. Their fear was understandable, since the Myanmar government requested very detailed information, including that on parents, grandparents (both maternal and paternal sides), siblings, in-laws, spouse and his/her siblings, and their occupations and addresses. A migrant submitting this information feared endangering relatives in Myanmar.

According to interviews with Myanmar officials, the rationale for asking detailed information was to ensure that the applicants were ‘genuine’ Myanmar citizens, not anti-government activists and ethnic Rohingyas, who were not recognized as citizens by the Myanmar government. Such information seeking created a dilemma for migrants. On the one hand, they were required to go through the process; on the other hand, they feared that the information would be misused by local authorities in Myanmar. Many migrants, at least until late 2010, had refused to go through NV on this assumption. To avoid risk to their families, many wrote inaccurate information on the forms. The result was a high rate of rejection. According to June 2010 data, about 24,300 workers in Chiang Mai applied for NV. Only about 4000 were approved, 10,000 were rejected and the other 10,000 were still waiting for approval. Due to encouragement from broker companies and migrant NGOs, more people started applying and providing accurate information by late 2010. At the end
of April 2011, about 14,438 migrant workers in Chiang Mai (502,484 countrywide) had passed their NV (Hall, 2011).

Unlike the governments of Laos and Cambodia that had set up passport offices on the Thai side of the border, the Myanmar government not only refused to set up offices in Thailand, but also required a centralized verification process. Applications had to be transported from Thailand to the Myanmar capital of Nay Pyi Daw. Once Nay Pyi Daw confirmed the applicants’ citizenship status, Thailand issued a temporary travel permit for migrants to cross the border into Myanmar to receive temporary passports (and a Thai visa). Given the complexity of this process, Thailand contracted 22 officially recognized private companies to provide application services. The official fees for NV were supposed to be 200 THB for a Myanmar passport and 500 THB for a two-year Thai visa. The companies in Chiang Mai, operated by government officials or their families, or those who had connections with the ministries, charged migrants from 4800–6500 THB (USD 160–215).

In short, migrants who had previously registered for temporary stay paying 3800 THB (USD 130) were required to spend another 4800–6500 THB (USD 160–215) for NV. Once they got passports, they were required to get a two-year work permit (if their previously acquired work permit had expired or would expire soon), which cost them another 1900 THB (USD 65) depending on the type of work permit. In addition, expiry dates on passport, visa and work permit did not always synchronize with each other. Workers were required to extend the validity of different documents, which cost between 1900–3900 THB (USD 65–130).

Another proposed charge to migrants was five per cent of their income for social security benefits and 400 THB (USD 13) a month for six months to be used for deportation once their employment term expired. This was in line with article XI of the MoU that forced migrants to contribute 15 per cent of their monthly income to a savings fund.

All these charges added up to a multi billion THB revenue for Thailand. In mid-2011, nearly one million migrants registered for temporary stay. This amounted to about 4 billion THB including health care charges (3800 THB multiplied by one million workers). This revenue was possible only when migrants agreed to register with the government.
This did not mean, however, that undocumented migrants did not contribute to revenue. Registering once did not mean being legal permanently, since migrants might decide not to register the following year. Zam, a 25-year-old migrant worker was one such example. Originally from southern Shan State, Zam worked in Chiang Mai as a construction worker. His wife, 22, used to be a domestic worker, but now cleaned at the apartment building she and Zam built as construction workers. Both of them had migrant registration papers and work permits, but the couple planned not to apply for NV because it would cost them two temporary registrations. If they finally decided not to go through NV, they might become 'illegal'. If so, they might be paying informal taxes to police and local officials – just like non-registered migrants.

It would be a mistake though, to see migrant regulation as a single, systematic and coherent set of practices and enforcement, dictated by the state. As Coutin argues, regulation of mobility involves ‘numerous practices, usually carried out by people who have no connection to the government, but . . . constitute[s] individuals as citizens, illegal migrants, legal residents, etc.’ (Coutin, 1993: 88). In Thailand, the issue of ‘illegal migrants’ had not been apparent until the early 1990s when the Thai government decided to implement the ‘regular’ registration of undocumented migrants (Chalamwong, 2001: 12). Since then, there has been annual migrant regularization followed by thorny issues such as whether to deport unregistered migrants or keep them for employers who need them; strikes by the registered migrants for minimum wages; conflicts between registered migrants and employers who bribe the police to arrest them; and clashes between those who lobby the government for migrant registration, and racists and nationalists against migrants. These contradictions and struggles have created a political stage on which policy makers speak of controlling migrants, academics discuss ‘problems’, the public expresses discomfort and the media covers ‘chaos’. Sooner or later, the migrants have come to appear as dangerous and troublesome transgressors who needed to be strictly controlled. In the same vein, local civil society groups, student organizations, media outlets and residents have urged authorities to restrict migrant workers (Latt, 2008). And yet, the state apparatus has continued to be the most important in the arena of governance. The following section, however, takes a further analytical step in understanding the extension of regulation by investigating the role of para-state agents who have engaged in extra-legal financial exchanges with the migrants.
9.6.2. Semi-legal extortion

The illustration above depicts the official charges migrants endured as they entered legalization programs. They had already been paying unofficial fees for various programs prior to entering the legalization program. While the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Labour issued worker IDs, local governments issued different types of documents to irregular migrants. For example, Ying, a Shan woman who had arrived in Chiang Mai’s Fang district in early 2010 enrolled in a village fund, initiated by the village head and local police officers. She paid 250 THB (USD 9) a month for protection from police arrest. In October 2010, however, she was arrested, since her receipt proving her fund membership was with her employer. She spent four days in a detention centre and 23 days in jail before her employer bailed her out for 1000 THB (USD 30). When asked why her employer did not help her right away, she said he did not need her labour at that time.

Another important document has been the ‘10-Year Card’ (bat sip pi), one of the various ‘hill tribe’ identity cards in Thailand. Bat sip pi, initially issued in the mid 2000s, was probably the newest kind of identity card for people in Thailand who did not have any identity card at all. In principle, this card was for those who had been living in Thailand before 1996. It allowed cardholders to stay in the district where he/she was registered. Travelling outside the district required permission from the district office. Unidentifiable numbers of migrant workers had somehow managed to acquire this ID mostly from small villages in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Mae Hong Son provinces. In my sample of 130 migrants, seven respondents were ‘hill tribe’ cardholders, mostly bat sip pi (although the number could be higher because people hesitated to reveal cards acquired through backdoor channels).

Noam, a 23-year-old Shan woman whose family resided in a small village in Chiang Mai province, had received her 10-year card in 2007 after spending more than 20,000 THB (USD 660). Since she worked in Chiang Mai City, she needed travel permission from the district office. She renewed her travel permission every six months. Each renewal cost her 700 THB (USD 25) for typing fees, according to officials. Noam explained the complicated fees and process regarding travel permit renewal:
150 THB for a photo – even when we said we already have photos, they take photo again and take money from us. Another 100 THB is for registration. Once I arrive in Chiang Mai, I need the Chiang Mai district officer’s signature to prove that I live in Chiang Mai. It costs 20 THB. If there is no signature from Chiang Mai district official, the police (including the ones stationed on highways) can charge 200 THB. If I need to change information on my travel document or my card, I need to pay again. Since there are many migrants for this thing, you can jump the queue if you pay 3000 THB (USD 100). Since many migrants cannot wait for days or weeks, they pay 3000 THB (interview, 24 July 2011).

Her card and travel document were good for ‘stay’ only. If she wanted to work, she needed a work permit from the Chiang Mai employment office, which would cost her 3800 THB (USD 130). Noam did not have a work permit, but she worked at a community organization for 6000 THB (USD 200) a month, and sometimes worked at a restaurant in the evening. If she were found working in Chiang Mai, she could be arrested.

Noam was in trouble with her card back in the village in early 2011; the district office cancelled about 15,000 registrations out of 20,000. Her card was recovered after her mother paid local officials 3500 THB (USD 120). She could apply for a six-month travel paper, but she was uncertain whether her card was still valid or the travel paper was temporary. According to Noam, this cancelling plan was to generate more money by local officials:

Officials from the district office said the police are not happy because they did not get their share. So, the officers said people could re-register as new applicants if their previous cards were cancelled (interview, 26 August 2011).

In September 2011, she accompanied our group of travellers to Mae Hong Son. She obtained a one-month travel document, which identified Mae Hong Son as the permitted destination. She spent 400 THB (USD 15) for the document, which was twice the cost of her VIP minivan ticket from Chiang Mai to Mae Hong Son.

9.6.3. Illegal extortion

In Thailand, migrant workers commonly feared that police officers would detain them for money. In my sample, 33 respondents (out of 60) noted that they had had
encounters with police who either arrested or fined them for riding a motorbike without a license or helmets (19 persons), or not having migrant documents (14 persons).

In Fang district there were two major police crackdowns on migrants every year: one before New Year and another before Songkram Water Festival (Buddhist new year). Usually, there was no fixed operation except when informers or local residents called the police (interview, police official, 6 March 2011). Many arrests were by corrupt officers to profit through the backdoor. In a consultation meeting between government officials and migrant NGOs held in Chiang Mai in June 2011, a question was raised over police officers raiding the same construction site 30 times (consultation meeting, 2011).

In addition to arbitrary raiding of migrant homes and worksites, the restrictive migrant policies created conditions in which migrants were vulnerable to extortion by corrupt police officers. Given that migrant workers could not register with the government without an employer to sign the application, daily labourers, who did have not have a permanent employer, ‘hired’ nominal employers. They paid varying amounts of money (about 1000 THB or USD 30) to these nominal employers to use their names for registration. These migrants were vulnerable to police arrest since they might be caught working for employers who were different from those on their documents. Kham, a Shan woman in her thirties, worked at a karaoke bar in a Shan shantytown area behind one of Chiang Mai’s Tesco Lotus shopping malls. One evening, a police officer followed Kham on her way back from the bar after midnight. He stopped her at a corner near the road towards Nawarat Bridge. Since she was registered as a domestic worker, her employment at the karaoke bar was ‘illegal’. Afraid of the police, she admitted that she worked at the bar (instead of lying that she was just visiting). She was forced to pay 1000 THB (USD 30) but she only had about 200 THB (USD 7) in her purse. The policeman took all 200 THB.

Mooe’s experience with the police was even more telling. A 45-year-old construction worker and father of two, Mooe had been in Thailand since the early 2000s. Up to May 2011, he had been arrested about 20 times by the traffic police, as migrants without passports were not qualified for a driver’s license. He estimated that he had given about 20,000 THB (USD 660) to the officers including the same officer who always checked his license knowing that he did not have one.
A police officer arrested me every time he saw me at the traffic light (Huay Kaew and Super Highway intersection). He knew I didn’t have a driver’s license. So he always arrested me…. I asked him ‘Why do you always arrest me? Please have mercy on me because I have a family. I have paid lots of money to you already. Where can I get more money?’ When I paid him 350 THB [as opposed to 1000 THB], he said ‘mai dai’ [meaning not profiting]. So, I asked him, ‘What do you mean by ‘mai dai’ since you didn’t invest any money to arrest me?’ (Interview, 20 August 2011)

Mooe received his driver’s license in May 2011 for 650 THB (USD 20). Still, he ended up having to pay fines. One evening, he was fined 200 THB for not carrying a motorbike license (not his driver’s license) with him. Mooe’s fines were not that bad compared to other migrants who were charged 1000 THB (USD 30) for not wearing a helmet, whereas Thai ID holders were charged 200 THB (USD 6–7) for the same offense. Although the agency of migrants is beyond the scope of this chapter, it should be mentioned that migrants were not totally passive victims. While they were subject to extortion and exploitation, they exercised their agency by avoiding roads and intersections where police officers were likely to stop them.

Extraction of money by the ministry in the name of migrant registration and by state/para-state officers was a form of dispossession. In the contemporary literature in political ecology, development and migration studies, the term ‘dispossession’ is used mostly to refer to the expulsion of people from land. The term, however, can be applied more widely as Rosa Luxemburg (2003) and David Harvey (2004) do. Although these studies look at the credit system, commoditization, privatization and freezing assets through inflation and enclosures of commons, their arguments about dispossession can be read as referring ultimately to depletion of resources. In other words, people being deprived of essential resources amounts to dispossession. In the case of the Shan in Thailand, it was not land, fish or crops but the wage income that they primary depended on, that they lost. Taking away their wage income constantly meant taking away their means of survival and constantly keeping them in a state of deprivation. In addition, depriving the migrants of citizenship and legal status and enacting restrictive policies in the name of protecting state sovereignty and security was also dispossession, as it created conditions in which the government and state/para-state officials could extort money to drain migrants’ financial resources. The fact that the ADB relegated migrant regulation to the national level indirectly contributed to such financial extortion, legal status
deprivation and restrictive policies, thus implicating the ADB in this process of dispossession.

9.7. Conclusion

This chapter draws attention to a little-studied aspect of migrant regulation by showing that extra-legal financial exchanges between state/para-state agents and quasi-legal migrants constituted an important part of what migrants experienced as the regulatory process. In Thailand, migrants spent money for migrant registration in various steps. In addition, they were required to spend money for semi-legal registration programs and to corrupt officials who exploited the migrants' ‘deportability’. These interactions between authorities and migrants were the everyday state/migrant relations that continuously depleted migrants’ financial resources. Such extractions resulted in both keeping migrants poor and forcing them to bear low wages and poor working conditions.

Ethnic migrants’ life stories unsettle the ADB claims that irregular migrants do not contribute to the social system through paying taxes. It is true that they do not pay ‘income taxes’, but they have been contributing to a local revenue circus in various ways, in addition to providing cheap labour. Their experiences raise the question of the ADB’s role in protecting regional migrants. The role of the ADB was, in fact, not taking any role at all beyond encouraging the nationalization of regulation. Claiming that unregulated migration was increasingly causing political and economic costs, the ADB supported regulation in principle without preventing state forces from exerting extortion and violence. The Bank was more concerned with regulating mobility than addressing inhumane and restrictive national control of cross-border populations. Moreover, the ADB’s support for restrictive national policies meant that the Bank’s romantic ‘community’ turned out to be a nightmare for the vast majority of vulnerable migrants. The kind of nationalized regulation that the ADB supported not only reinforced migrants’ national citizenship (i.e. neither Thai nor GMS citizens), but also allowed national governments to sustain a legalization process and related informal arrangements that were violent and exploitative.

The Bank’s relegating migrant regulation to the national level contradicted the everyday experiences of migrants whose reality of migration could not be fixed to the
nation-state administrative and geographic grids. They did not move from one country to another – from Myanmar to Thailand. They moved from one point to another. Their hardships and struggles throughout the journey were about socio-economic experiences of a borderland political economy. Governing their experiences through the practices of the ‘national’ government was problematic in many ways. For instance, the Burmese state’s quest for sovereignty in the name of nation-state building was implicated in dispossessing people. Similarly, the system of governance based on national belonging and citizenship, to which both Myanmar and Thailand subscribed, made people ‘illegal’ from the moment they decided to leave their village. Once they moved, being ‘illegal’ or ‘clandestine’ made them vulnerable to abuses and exploitation throughout the unsettling journey. National governance over these people on the move deepened national control and governance over people’s movement and belonging (legal status). Instead of envisioning a new regional regime that better protected people on the move, the GMS, regardless of its regional rhetoric, only strengthened the national system of governance that not only restricted people’s choice of movement but also criminalized them, thus not only making it difficult to pursue livelihood opportunities, but also made them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. If the control over national membership was the terrain of sovereign claims, the ADB’s relegating migrant governance to the national state meant enhancing the national state’s control over its borders and membership – the right and the power to exclude -- contradicted the GMS version of the “dream world” (Wong, 2010) of harmony and community.

On the part of Thailand, national regulation reflected not only the systemic process that opened up a space for labour exploitation but also showed the very intention, or hypocrisy, of state officials’. For, on the one hand, as earlier chapters discussed, the Thai government stated that the Shan did not run from conflict and they therefore were seen as ‘migrant workers’ who entered Thailand illegally. This was the basis that forced Shan migrants/refugees/displaced persons to undertake migrant registration. On the other hand, state officials such as the director of EGAT (Chapter 5) said the Shan were displaced not because of the dam, but because of ‘shooting’. Such attitudes and practices of denial within the Thai government (the Shan as ‘illegal’ ‘economic migrants’, but not refugees; the Shan as displaced by shooting, not the dam) were not accidental. Rather, these statements reflected the character of the national state less willing to take
responsibility for the poor and vulnerable that created spaces and conditions in which the poor and vulnerable could be exploited and dispossessed – the character of the ADB and development under the GMS.
Chapter 10. Conclusion

To ask a bold question, why is violence at the heart of development? Why are the Shan migrants in northern Thailand living in a vicious cycle of poverty and violence despite national and regional development programs that, according to proponents, aim to help the poorest and most vulnerable people? That question is central to understanding the links among violence, displacement and development. Experiences of the Shan confirm the classic argument about the interdependence between state sovereign claims and the territorial expansion of capital, while adding a new understanding that “development efforts”, rather than “development” per se, underpin state claims for sovereignty that also serve the (re)production of the social relations of capitalism. The question of the entanglement of violence, displacement and development cannot be uncoupled from the violence of capitalist social relations (Sharma, 2015) and the practices of ‘statecraft’ (Soguk, 1999), because both statecraft and the (re)production of capitalist social relations involve the violent dispossession of people from their land and livelihoods, a process that Marx (1964) calls “primitive accumulation” and Harvey (2003) calls “accumulation by dispossession”. ‘Statecraft’ here refers to the state’s efforts at consolidating and sustaining national territorial control through discourses of the nation-state, state sovereignty and territorial security.

The experiences of the Shan in Burma and Thailand have revealed that being stuck in a vicious circle of poverty and violence was not an accidental error in the system of rule. Indeed it reflects the very social relations deeply inherent in the capitalist system of rule in which the state, within its compartmentalized national territory, needs to create the social conditions to secure the transnational capital upon which state power depends. To elaborate, as John Agnew argues, capital has never been contained in national territorial boundaries (Agnew, 1994; see also Glassman, 1999). State power, in turn, is thought of as being exercised within compartmentalized nation-state boundaries. The way capital travels transnationally and the way state sovereignty is ideologically fixed within national boundaries make it appear that transnational capital and national states are contradictory to each other. Nonetheless, capital and the nation-state go hand in hand and depend on each other in that state power is contingent not only on sovereign control over territory, but also on its access to capital (Sharma, 2015). Similarly, as O’Connor argues
(1998), the market alone cannot create the social relations conducive to capitalist expansion. The market always requires the state to create social relations on its behalf so that capital can gain access to the necessary land, labour, and environmental resources required for economic expansion. The state creates such social conditions, often violently, for two interrelated reasons. First, the state especially, in the Third World, does not always have hegemonic control over areas it considers to be ‘national territory’. The state therefore orchestrates these territories into its national domain through discourses and practices of nation-state building, territorial claims and, if necessary, counterinsurgency. Second, since capital’s exclusive access to land and environmental resources requires detaching them from people who are already using them, the state expels people from the land to “free up” resources (Sturgeon et al., 2013) for use as capital. Therefore, the violence inflicted on people is not accidental; it is the very basis of the complex and entangled relations between state claims for sovereignty and the (re)production of the social relations necessary for transnational capital.

What facilitates the intersection of the state claims for national territory and the (re)production of capitalist social relations is ‘development efforts’. The experiences of the Shan in the context of the GMS development program reveal two major insights about GMS development efforts. First, development efforts allow the state to claim territory and reinforce state power; and second, they depoliticize conflict and violence in the process of (re)producing the capitalist social relation across national borders. Because of this connection, development efforts in the GMS, in practice, are not really the means to help poor people. Rather, they provide the facilitative discourse and practice, in whose name the state can create the necessary social relations for transnational capital. The process of state sovereign claims and (re)producing capitalist social relations are violent because they involve taking away people’s land and resources. The factors constituting violence, however, cannot be reduced to any single variable or simple causal relation. The process of violence is implicated in entanglements of various political, economic and historical-cultural processes, events and contradictions at different sites and scales. The following sections reiterate these points with empirical findings from this dissertation.

The state, sovereignty and violence
One key area of investigation for an analytical understanding of the complex web of forces and contradictions that entail violence is the political economy of sovereign territorial control, or what Navzat Soguk (1994) calls 'the regimentation of statecraft'. This regimentation requires that violence be situated in the workings of the state that continues to play a central role in politics and economy. Focusing on the state does not reduce the analytical inquiry to the state or treat it as the only or most important actor. Neither does it to downplay the role of non-state actors in either causing or countering violence. In addition, the state is not taken to be a central homogenous bureaucratic entity, but rather seen in a Foucauldian sense in which the modern form of power is dispersed at various sites. In this sense, the purpose of inquiry is to highlight the roles, interests, rationalities and actions of institutions and actors populating state organizations such as ministries, the army, and the police, as well as state officials and quasi-state agents. The crucial role of the state in violence in the context of this research is backed by research findings. For example, 70.2% of displaced Shan people from the research sample said they left Myanmar for Thailand due to Burmese soldiers' abuses (see Chapter 5). In the same vein, Shan migrants’ experience of violence in Thailand has to do with state agents and institutions (the Ministry of Labour, the police, local authorities such as village heads) charging taxes or extorting money or treating migrants badly in physically harmful ways (see Chapter 9).

A crucial element to understanding the role of the state in relation to violence is the specific ideologies and discourses of particular states that inform their policy choices and strategic actions. This dissertation demonstrates that a crucial political element of violence is state territorialization (establishing territorial control and political-bureaucratic reach) in which strong nationalist attitudes towards ‘others’ such as ethnic minorities and migrants occur. In this process, similar to Moore’s (2005) findings in Zimbabwe, history is not a matter of the past; it is entangled with the landscape of present political struggles in that specific historical understandings of geography and nationhood reinforce the ruling blocs’ perceived need for the consolidation of national territory.

Since its founding, the Burmese state has never been able to consolidate territorial domination in the resource-rich borderlands where ethnic minority people live. The standard version of the country’s history as a proud Burmese civilization with extensive
territorial control, a narrative that the contemporary military leaders deeply adhere to, has caused them to try to crush the ongoing resistance from ethnic armed groups for autonomy since the country’s independence in 1948. The minority groups, on the other hand, have resorted to armed resistance to reclaim state promises about autonomy, rights and political equality that the post-colonial Burmese regime has failed to keep. Violence has ensued as the armed resistance has been confronted by the government’s counterinsurgency operations in the name of protecting sovereignty and *Nae Myae Soe Moe Yae* (literally, territorial control).

These historically contingent insurgency and counterinsurgency movements in the context of nation-state building have become entangled with the dynamics of natural resource endowment in the conflict zones in the era of post-Cold War capitalist penetration in the GMS region. That is, areas in Myanmar where ethnic minority people are concentrated have long been known to be resource rich territories. These are the territories where military contestations have taken place between the Burmese army and ethnic groups. The military struggle for territorial control for resource access (logging, gold mining, jade, or drug trafficking) in order to finance its military activities has led Myanmar to supply natural resources to China and Thailand, the frontline proponents of capitalist regionalization through GMS regionalization. In short, it is the entanglement of the capitalist regionalization of resource claims, the post-colonial struggle over national territories, and militarized nation-state building that have coalesced in producing violence.

As a by-product of nation-state building in Myanmar, dispossessed people from conflict zones in Myanmar became cheap labour readily available to Thailand. As discussed in Chapter 9, migrants were needed in Thailand but were not wanted. The Thai government implemented migrant registration programs to control the numbers and movement of migrants and displaced people. Migrants were seen as threats to border security, health, culture, and the economy of what Thongchai calls the Thai 'geo-body' (1994). Even though migrants constituted an important segment of the labour force, they were often portrayed as disease carriers, drug traffickers, criminals and those whose presence disrupted the “national order of things” (Malkki, 1992:25). Seen through the lenses of fear and threat, the Thai state securitized migration; various restrictions severely
limited the mobility and rights of migrants in an attempt to secure the border and territorial sovereignty.

The Thai state, however, opportunistically calculated its participation in supra-national networks for development such as the GMS program, while never compromising its sovereign territorial rights. In this way, when regional socio-economic processes in the name of regional development got entangled with domestic processes of state territorial claims, the state took advantage of the regional grouping if it served its own political and material interests, but foreclosed unwanted intervention from supra-national networks. Far from compromising sovereign rights to regional governance networks, the Thai state’s calculated participation in the GMS asserted, enhanced and reinforced its sovereign and territorial rights.

For Myanmar, its participation in the GMS sought to maintain its political and economic relations with neighbouring countries in the face of economic sanctions from western governments. The Myanmar state hoped to engage with its neighbours and earn revenue by selling natural resources in order to run the country and finance its military activities. These steps also opened Myanmar to GMS neighbours with respect to development of infrastructure, enhancement of tourism and strengthening the information technology sector, all of which became enrolled in the state’s counterinsurgency tactics against ethnic armed groups. For Thailand, its participation in the GMS secured access to markets and resources from its neighbours, particularly the oil and gas, hydro power, forest products, other natural resources and labour from Myanmar, and to a lesser extent from Laos and Cambodia.

Both countries, however, closed off GMS/ADB intervention when it came to issues sensitive to each country. For instance, Myanmar was sensitive to criticism regarding violent political conflicts. Thailand was sensitive on the migration issue, which it interpreted as a 'national' affair. Both prohibited “outsiders” from intervening in affairs considered to be internal or national, thus disallowing the ADB from having any say in such issues as political violence and migrant regulation. This stance reflected a contradiction between the opportunistic states’ active appreciation of 'supra-national' arrangements that served
'national' interests, and their resistance to any supra-national involvement in matters considered to concern 'national', security, or sovereign affairs.

**Form, Contents and Agents of Violence**

How exactly did violence take place? This research highlights three key points: one concerns the 'form' of violence and the other two concern the 'contents' and 'agents'.

In this study, violence took the form of dispossession. John Agnew’s concept of the 'territorial trap' (Agnew, 1994) helps broaden the analytical inquiry on dispossession by looking at the series of events, processes and experiences of people in a transnational context. My research found that dispossession involved more than people being uprooted from the land. Dispossession was not a one-time incident but rather a long transnational, multi-spatial and temporal process that included depriving people of legal status, and continually stripping them of the material resources necessary for a secure livelihood and human dignity.

Again, the origin of these dispossessions were related to the practices of 'statecraft' or state territorialization, in which the state's commitment to sovereign territorialization provided a basis for uprooting people from their land and denying their political and material rights. For instance in Myanmar, the Burmese military uprooted people in the name of state territorial consolidation (counterinsurgency). Once people were displaced to Thailand, their legal status and rightful physical presence were denied on the basis that they did not 'belong' in Thailand. Seeing them as a security threat, state and para-state agents enacted specific forms of treatment on the dispossessed people in the name of security, sovereignty and territorial integrity, such as the migrant regulation program, or arrest and deportation, either of which entailed both physical violence and material deprivation. This physical violence and material deprivation comprised the “content” of violence. This research illuminated that material deprivation through fees and fines, and both legal and extra-legal forms of extortion, constituted a crucial dynamic of dispossession. This study highlights the ways the Shan in Burma were subject to extortion by poor and starving Burmese government soldiers (Chapter 6), then taxed heavily by the Thai government in the name of migrant regulation, and subsequently subject again to extortion by officials at different levels such as district administrators and police officers.
These findings revealed a crucial dynamic of governance in that the common understanding of ‘governance’ deems extra-legal exchanges as ‘illegal’ or corrupt. This research showed, however, that extortion or extra-legal exchanges in both Myanmar and Thailand were not outside the sphere of ‘proper’ governance; in both countries they constituted a crucial content of governance. In the case study on Myanmar, 70.2% out of 78 research respondents said that military-related activities were the reason they left for Thailand. Arbitrary taxation and extortion of property, food and livestock by Burmese soldiers ranked high after physical torture and forced labour. In Thailand, the Ministry of Labour charged high fees in the name of migrant registration, while district officials and police officers extorted money in an assortment of ways. All these legal or extra-legal extractions took away resources needed for the migrants’ well being and livelihood security. The argument here is that these fees and extortions were a form of dispossession that deprived people of resources they depend on for survival.

In term of the “agent” of violence, this research takes direct issue with global policy discourses on poverty and violence. Unlike policy studies that largely focus on non-state armed groups as the main perpetrators of violence, my case study on Myanmar focused on the state as the primary agent of violence in the context of counterinsurgency operations. This claim is not to generalize that non-state armed groups have been unproblematic. My purpose is to argue against global policy studies (e.g. World Bank, 2011), in which sweeping generalizations turn non-state armed groups into villains by default, meaning that state militaries have been conceptualized as naturally legitimate actors whose legitimacy and institutional capacities were to be strengthened. The risk of such a generalized conceptualization has been the tendency in international policy communities to let violent state actors escape critical scrutiny. In part because of this international tendency, this research focused on Burmese government soldiers as the perpetrators of violence.

The policy literature has also suggested that poverty and unemployment are the key reasons people join insurgent armed groups, since armed groups could offer better access to income and resources than being unemployed or relying on farm work. This argument does not hold true in the context of eastern Myanmar. The reasons people joined the Burmese army were not because of ‘income’. Far from benefiting by joining the
army, foot soldiers faced a survival crisis in which they became extremely poor and indebted, and even starved on the front lines, due to poor financing of the army and various forms of extortion by their senior officers (Chapter 6).

The conditions facing Burmese government soldiers also revealed instances in which poverty was in fact related to violence. The socio-economic conditions for soldiers and the exploitative power relations within the military were crucial in understanding why soldiers acted violently against civilians. Although soldiers perpetrated violence on civilians in performing their duty to enforce sovereignty and territorial integrity, their everyday violent treatment of Shan villagers—either physical violence or extortion—was more about offloading their own problems of poverty, starvation and injustice onto the Shan. To elaborate, apart from the poorly funded national army, soldiers were taxed heavily within their battalions for various fund-raising activities, such as for religious days, holidays, battalion compound maintenance, and gifts to commanders. Their material conditions made them so poor that they rarely had enough money for daily expenses and their families. Conditions were even worse in rural areas, on the front lines, or during patrols. On the front lines and during patrol activities, soldiers were left to their own devices for survival. As a result, poor and starving soldiers looted Shan villagers in order to feed themselves.

Nonetheless, the poverty of Burmese soldiers did not automatically translate into violence against the Shan. How Burmese soldiers' poverty turned into violence involved a complex but specific set of overlapping factors. First, soldiers were exposed to oppression and serious physical abuse from senior officers when they joined or were conscripted into the army. This experience made them inured to violence beginning in their early days in the military. Second, the geographic imagination that turned people in the 'black' or 'brown' zones into 'enemies' who should be treated like 'sun and fire', as taught in the military, legitimated violent action. That is, Shan villages were located in the non-government control territories, making soldiers see them as 'enemies'—or 'homo sacer' (Agamben, 1998), the bare life that could be killed with impunity. In addition, the assumption that these villagers were supporters of insurgent groups, enemies who prolonged the conflict and made soldiers' lives miserable, encouraged soldiers to act violently. Moreover, the specific tradition of the Burmese military, a legacy of the fascist Japanese training during the anti-
colonial struggle, was that soldiers must carry out whatever their senior officers ordered, no matter whether those orders were logical, just, or not. According to the famous slogan, “I want water, I don't want to hear the bottle is leaking” - soldiers had to fulfill orders no matter what. In a sense, they became ‘petty sovereigns’ (Butler, 2006) in relational terms in that soldiers who had been impoverished and oppressed by their seniors would in turn enact oppression on villagers who were weaker (the please those above, press those below mentality), which again had to do with a specific tradition and attitude among the Burmese military inherited from its history. In short, these examples show that the relationship between poverty and violence was less straightforward than appears in policy studies. Rather, the relationship involved multiple layers and elements.

**Development, Violence, Capitalism**

If poverty does not automatically translate into violence, what does poverty reduction as a development strategy do to the business of addressing violent conflicts? The experiences of the Shan in the context of the GMS show that it was ‘development efforts’, not only ‘development’ per se, that requires attention. Contrary to policy discourses that recommend poverty reduction (or development) to reduce violent conflicts, this dissertation research found that the GMS regionalization program for development interacted with the forces of violence in ways that served the dual process of strengthening state sovereign claims and the state’s (re)production of capitalist social relations. ‘Development efforts’ did this, first of all, by separating ‘politics’ and ‘the economy’ to ideologically fix the former to the national domain and the latter to the regional domain. Second, the political process of creating the social conditions necessary for capital, which were often violent, were ignored on the basis of the need to observe each member state’s sovereignty and national territorial integrity, even as resources were exchanged as regional economic goods. The political process was crucial because it created the conditions, such as freeing up land, resources and labour, so that capital could utilize them as economic assets. Given that the state did not always have control over the territories capital wanted to access, the state needed to assert its control through discourses and practices of sovereignty. As Chapter 7 demonstrated in the context of Myanmar, this attempt was accompanied by counterinsurgency-oriented development efforts such as roads, bridges, health and education services through which the Myanmar state planned
to extend its bureaucratic reach into ethnic territories. In the name of state sovereignty, the national state took over land and resources through development efforts; in the name of development, transnational capital accessed and plundered those resources, such as oil and gas from Yadana and Yedagon projects (Chapter 8). Both the government’s counterinsurgency operation and development efforts such as the Yadana project dispossessed local people from their land and livelihoods. Therefore, the development efforts depicted here were not so much about helping poor people as they were about enhancing state power, deepening state control over territories, and creating the social relations required for capitalist plundering of resources.

The ADB culture of depoliticization was similar to Thailand’s approach in the context of migration. In addition to Thailand’s use of the GMS to enable border trade, such as receiving oil and gas from Myanmar, it received Shan people displaced by conflict and subsequent socio-economic problems in Myanmar. The GMS actually had a human resource development program to help manage migration and labour. This GMS program, however, did not translate into serving the interests of the displaced Shan. Although the migrant population constituted a large segment of the labour force for Thailand's economy, the GMS human resource development program neglected the issues of training, protection and welfare for migrant workers. The Mekong Institute in northeast Thailand was a training center for human resource training, but the program focused on skill training for 'citizens', such as government officials who would facilitate the GMS program, rather than on 'illegal migrant workers'. Instead of providing a framework for effective protection of migrants and displaced people, the GMS relegated migrant regulation to national governments. The by-product of national regulation was not only excessive restrictions, but also entailed increased vulnerability to violence for migrants in terms of physical abuse (arrest, detention, deportation) and financial extortion. The GMS/ADB had no say in this outcome because migrant regulation fell in the realm of 'national affairs', and cross-border migration was considered to be a threat to sovereignty and national territorial security. The GMS could not help migrants living in the vicious cycle of poverty and violence that ensued in Thailand. Left vulnerable and without protection, these migrants became ‘disposable’ labour to be exploited.
To sum up, the very aim of this dissertation research was to understand how violence is constituted and why people affected by violence are often bypassed by development efforts that, according to proponents, aim to help these people. In Myanmar, there were various state-sponsored development projects particularly aiming to help ethnic and borderland people. Yet the people in these regions have continued to be poor despite the fact that this part of the country was known to be rich in natural resources. In addition to a large number of internally displaced people, Myanmar also lost many thousands to Thailand. Thailand was known as one of the most stable economies in Southeast Asia. Yet, almost four million Burmese migrants in Thailand’s workforce were living in poverty and an abusive environment. At a regional level, the GMS development program had existed for more than twenty years. Regardless of its million-dollar projects underpinned by discourses of helping the poorest people in the region, poor and rural people continued to be poor, and conflict-affected people such as the Shan were untouched by the program in a positive way.

This dissertation argues that the vicious cycle of violence experienced by ethnic Shan in Myanmar and Thailand in the context of the GMS shows that the phenomenon of violence is much more complicated than policy discourses address. Unlike global policy studies (e.g. World Bank, 2011), it was not poor people’s joining insurgent groups that prolonged violent conflicts. In the case of Myanmar, violent conflicts were politically inspired and historically contingent. The Burmese state’s unwillingness to negotiate with ethnic groups with respect to their autonomy was the root cause of the prolonged conflict. Instead of a political settlement, the state pursued nation-state building towards a unitary state by trying to assert control over ethnic minority territories. In this process, capitalist regional development schemes with an eye on Myanmar’s natural resources came to be entangled. Development efforts under the GMS program served the Myanmar state’s deepening control over borderland territories. At the same time, the GMS provided discursive legitimacy to the Myanmar state in creating capitalist social conditions within its national territory. These conditions enabled transnational capital to appropriate natural resources, the sale of which financed the Myanmar state. The Myanmar state’s territorial claims and the creation of capitalist social relations were both wrought through violence that drove local people out of their land and property. Yet, the ADB had no means to protect and serve the poor and vulnerable, thereby allowing the violent state and violent
capitalist social relations to be reproduced. Therefore, violence can be seen to be at the heart of development efforts, and development cannot be seen as a simple solution to violent conflict. Likewise, regardless of its rhetoric, the GMS was not simply a 'peace time', 'natural' or 'economic' unit, it was – or at least the outcome has been – a violent 'regional' political project that enabled state violence and capitalist expansion in the region.
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