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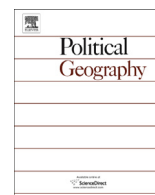
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# “Where is the border?” Villagers, environmental consultants and the ‘work’ of the Thai–Burma border



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This article examines how Thai–Burma border residents are enrolled and engaged in remaking the political border through their knowledge practices and performances, or their own “borderwork”. Border residents do not perform this work alone, but in connection with other actors including environmental consultants. In order to highlight this co-production of the political border, I bring together border studies scholarship that see borders as process and performance with work in science studies that has highlighted the way that knowledge and order are co-produced. The importance of this approach is that it facilitates an understanding of the multifaceted and contradictory work to remake the border by multiple actors, a way to study “borders from the bottom up” that illustrates how the border is continually enacted. While this article puts forth the notion that the border represents an important site and process of struggle and negotiation in which marginalized communities invest, it also questions the assumption that because residents are engaged in remaking the border, the border is necessarily more ‘democratic’. The discussion and empirical data presented in this article also speak to broader debates in political geography about how borders are remade through practice and performance.

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### Introduction

*Where is the border?*<sup>1</sup> An older Karen man posed this question during a hearing conducted as part of the decision-making process around the Hatgyi dam proposed along the Thai–Burma border. While the question was asked about one border in particular, it can also be considered part of a larger discussion on political borders. It speaks directly, for instance, to a recent article in this journal (Johnson et al., 2011: 61), which through a series of interventions pointedly asks “where is the border” in border studies?

In conversation with these questions, I argue in this article that residents at the Thai–Burma border are invested in remaking that border through their own “borderwork” (Rumford, 2008a, 2008b). In other words, they undertake and are invested in work that manages and remakes the political border, and this runs in contrast to the notion that border residents in Southeast Asia exclusively resist or circumvent the border.

Highlighting the borderwork of residents matters to the study of borders because it shows the extent that conventional border studies continue to privilege the idea of a centralized nation-state.

Border studies has too often ignored that the processes of bordering and being bordered are often simultaneous and complementary, and occur at scales that are both bound up with and unbound from nation-states. These parallel and overlapping acts, which require the participation and the active narrative and physical efforts of residents, are the concern of this article.

This borderwork also matters to border residents, such as the individual who raised the question of the border’s location. Studies that ignore or that position border residents and other actors as peripheral to political borders also ignore their roles as agents in borderwork. However, I am not proposing that residents act independently or are conducting this borderwork alone. Borderwork is an act of co-production carried out in connection with other individuals and institutions.

Drawing work in political geography into conversation with scholarship in science studies, the research presented here conceptualizes the political border as something that is continually performed and enacted. This conceptualization facilitates an understanding of the multifaceted and contradictory work by multiple actors to remake the border, and offers a way to study “borders from the bottom up”. Acknowledging and examining borders as work can provide an understanding of the process of bordering and of the potentially overlooked relationships between border residents, officials, activists, and environmental consultants, as all

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engage with the presence and implications of the political border itself. This approach highlights that borders, in their recognition and daily operation, are accomplishments that require work and that must be maintained through their continual enactment and expression at multiple scales and sites.

The research I present here to make these arguments reflects the two intertwined stories of the Salween River-border in Southeast Asia: that of the political border, but also that of the river as a site and pathway for development. Delimited by the British to clarify colonial forestry operations, modern planning for five to six dams along the river-border poses questions for how the border will be transformed. I argue that the Salween case reveals an opportunity to understand how residents are enrolled and invested in border making. To make these arguments, this article draws on 12 months of research conducted in 2010–2011 at the Thai–Burma border, in addition to other locations within Thailand. I also incorporate and build on the rich literature on borders in Southeast Asia, as part of a move to de-center debates on borders and more seriously consider borders scholarship in Southeast Asian and other (post)colonial contexts.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows: first, I provide a more detailed explanation of the study of *borders as work*. Second, I briefly situate this research within the literature on Southeast Asia borders. Third, I introduce the research site and methods, and fourth, I illustrate how borderwork is carried out there and by whom, drawing on three examples: a participatory project called Tai Baan (“Villager Research”) done by border residents and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the work of environmental consultants who delivered the dam’s EIA, and the public information disclosure hearings about the proposed dam that followed the EIA’s initial delivery. Finally, I bring together the “work” of these actors to consider the implications and how they inform our understanding how borders are made as well as the motivations for bordering.

### Borders as work

The move to understand the border as maintained by a variety of actors<sup>2</sup> including local residents, and as done through *work*, stems from my own effort to make sense of the many contradictory facets of research at the Thai–Burma border. The term “borderwork” as conceptualized by Rumford (2008a, 2008b) highlights that borders require *work*; they are created and maintained by the formal and informal labor of real people. This, in turn, builds on scholarship that has sought to understand the border as process and performance, allowing “us to see more clearly that citizens are not always subjected to bordering” (Rumford, 2008a, 2008b: 10) and rather that the work of a variety of actors might matter to the making of the political border. Rumford treats borderwork in the European context, as “the role of citizens (and indeed non-citizens) in envisioning, constructing, maintaining and erasing borders” (Rumford, 2008a, 2008b: 2).

This approach highlights the possibility for the border to “be done differently,” and, optimistically, Rumford suggests that “borderwork is less and less something over which people have no control” (Rumford, 2008a, 2008b: 10). It can be seen as part of a broader shift in scholarship toward treatments that do not privilege the role of a central state in bordering, and that highlight border practices as part of our daily lives (Balibar, 2002; Donnan & Wilson, 1999; Doty, 2007; Heyman, 1995; Megoran, 2006, 2012; Mountz, 2010; Nevins, 2002; Newman, 2006; Paasi, 1996; Reeves, 2011; Walters, 2006). It also resonates with studies of border residents in Southeast Asia that I will discuss below (Baird, 2010; Sturgeon, 2004, 2005; Turner, 2010; Walker, 1999). While these and other studies might incline us to read power at the border as necessarily more dynamic or democratic,

in his discussion of borderwork Rumford also cautions that it “can be exclusionary and by no means always works for democratization or humanitarian ends” (2008: 8). This is an important caution against the easy assertion that as more people become enrolled in border making, borders necessarily become more democratic (see also: Doevevspeck, 2011; Newman, 2006).

To conceptually and methodologically highlight the notions of practice and performance, I bring insights in science studies to speak to borders as practice, particularly in their respective emphases on the actions and practices of a variety of actors that work to produce or continually re-enact institutions. Work in science studies has made two important contributions that I draw on in conceptualizing “borders as work” and that I aim to explicate here: *co-production* (Jasanoff, 2004; Latour, 1987) and *knowledge as practice* (Pickering, 1995). However, by looking to science studies I am not arguing that the work to co-produce the political border is the same as “boundary work” between fields of knowledge to delineate a category known as the border. Instead, the arguments put forth examine how knowledge practices and performances are a part of (re)producing or enacting the institution and process of the political border. The idea that the political border is negotiated and remade through knowledge-making practices is one way that my research can contribute to larger debates regarding how borders are remade.

Sheila Jasanoff’s work is particularly important here. While many scholars have focused on the insights from Latour’s work (1991, 1999, 2005) in geography (Fall, 2010; Jones & Clarke, 2006), I build on Jasanoff’s conceptualization of co-production as the mutual construction of knowledge and visions of appropriate order (Jasanoff, 2004). Jasanoff’s work has been crucial in science studies in understanding how knowledge, policy, and social order are not made independently but are “co-produced” (Jasanoff, 2004, 2012; Jasanoff & Long Martello, 2004). This approach “provides, following Latour and Foucault’s later work, the possibility of seeing certain ‘hegemonic’ forces not as given but as the (co-)products of contingent interactions and practices. These insights may, in turn, open up new opportunities for explanation, critique and social action.” (Jasanoff, 2004: 36; see also: Fairhead & Leach, 2003: 14). I highlight these insights and opportunities in the work of the border.

The second contribution from science studies that I draw upon is the approach to “knowledge as practice,” an approach that proves valuable because it seeks to explain or reveal how the divide between discourse and material is created. This is important for my argument because it highlights that, instead of knowledge-making as a simple documentation the border, knowledge produced at and about the border’s social and physical landscape (as occurred in and around the production of the Hatgyi dam EIA) is itself an act of co-production. This highlights the act of remaking to produce something new (or “hybrid”) with distinct characteristics (Haraway, 1991; Latour, 1999).

More recently, Matthews (2011: 13–14) has usefully contrasted a science studies approach with scholarship that has considered institutional or state knowledge and power as monolithic and in opposition to local knowledges [specifically this includes: Ferguson (1990), Escobar (1995), Scott (1998) and Agrawal (2005)]. Such approaches, he asserts, accept the “state” and its knowledge uniformly and at face value and as a result “are less useful than a formulation of knowledge as practice and performance” (2011: 14). Instead, Matthews builds on work in science studies to attend to the “informal networks of patronage by which officials, politicians, and ordinary people seek to appropriate or modify the power of the state” (Matthews, 2011: 14, see also: Tsing, 2005).

In this article, I trace these performances and networks forged between residents, officials and others who make knowledge about

and simultaneously enact the political border. I emphasize the process of making and mobilizing ecological knowledge, including the contestations and negotiations between different actors to legitimize their own knowledge and visions of order. Instead of approaching various actors' borderwork as distinct—or treating practice, performance and discourse as ontologically separate—I bring the insights of political geography together with science studies' instruction to consider how different actors work together. This intersection allows an understanding of the ways that these actors work not only to challenge the border but to productively reinforce or transform it.

### Imposed, resisted, and used: borders in Southeast Asia

The literature on borders in mainland Southeast Asia has argued that modern borders and states in Southeast Asia emerged radiating from the center (Duncan, 2004; van Schendel, 2002; Walker, 1999), imposed by colonial powers onto more ambiguous or overlapping boundaries (Winichakul, 1994). This scholarly interpretation has been echoed in a frequently stated admonition by campaigners and local residents at boundary sites throughout Southeast Asia that “we didn't cross the border, the border crossed us”. I want to draw attention to the implications of this ingrained characterization of political borders in Southeast Asia and to highlight what is at stake in this legacy when we investigate the positioning of border residents relative to those borders. I argue that as a consequence of accepting that borders were and are imposed, analysis continues to discount from consideration the part that residents play in enacting the political border. In addition, it fails to recognize the border as a site or institution that is invested in—politically, socially and economically—by many different actors.

My focus on the performances of the border as an institution and a site of agency adds to long-standing work that has emphasized border residents' agency in creating *cross-border spaces* (Baird, 2010; Grundy-Warr & Wong, 2002; Horstmann, 2011a) as well as in: *maneuvering* (Sturgeon, 2004), *outmaneuvering* (Turner, 2010; building on Michaud, 2010; van Schendel, 2002; Scott, 2009), *ignoring* (Dean, 2005), *negotiating* (Horstmann, 2011b; Schoenberger & Turner, 2008) or *using* (Baird, 2010) the political border. Important differences exist, however, between these arguments and those put forth in this article. I argue that more than making “use” of the political border, residents and other agents are integral actors in enacting it—it is their work that contributes to producing the border.

To introduce this important genealogy of borders in Southeast Asia, I have generalized three groups of literatures. I will briefly explore their contributions in the following paragraphs, and then draw out the implications of approaching “borders as work” in compliment to these literatures.

The first approach to borders in Southeast Asia clearly positions borders as imposed or imported, mostly drawing on examples from colonial periods in Southeast Asia. Even if many have cited Winichakul's work in making these arguments (Baird, 2008: 597–598), notions of imposed borders have a longer history in scholarship on Southeast Asia.<sup>3</sup> Prior to Winichakul's *Siam Mapped*, scholars who presented borders as “imported” and “imposed” included, for instance, the well-known Edmund Leach (1960), Peter Kunstadter (1967), and Alastair Lamb (1968).<sup>4</sup> Accounting for the lack of precisely defined territories, Kunstadter contended that “the boundary or frontier areas were occupied by people who were *not* an integral part of the society of the central government, though they may have been involved as tributaries, as raiders, or sometimes as furnishers of forest products” (1967: 19). I emphasize the long-standing acceptance of borders as imposed because it highlights

the ingrained “nature” of how the study of political borders has been approached within Southeast Asia borders scholarship since at least those early post-war studies.

The second approach to border studies has focused on resistance or the ways that residents have circumnavigated the state and its borders (Michaud, 2010; Scott, 2009; Turner, 2010) as independent agents. As part of a recent special issue published in the *Journal of Global History* focused on “Zomia and beyond,” Sarah Turner, for instance, explores border narratives of the Sino–Vietnamese border, in direct conversation with the “Zomia thesis” (Michaud, 2010; van Schendel, 2002; Scott, 2009, see recent critiques Formoso, 2010; Jonsson, 2010, 2012).<sup>5</sup> Turner “attempt[s] to expose the artificial nature of this border, its porosity, and the means by which local residents – ‘borderline citizens’ in both the spatial and metaphorical use of the term – negotiate its being.” (2010: 269). The focus on the artificial border resonates with the imposed border, it locates the border as a foreign thing introduced from elsewhere. Further to this point, in the editorial to this special issue Michaud contends that “Borders, by their very political nature, artificially break up the historical social and cultural fabric of trans-border subjects and reduce the validity of country-based findings to what applies to a splinter group, with the larger entity often disappearing beyond the nation's borders” (2010: 209). The authors in the *Journal of Global History* special issue also primarily focus on circumnavigation and resistance to the political border (except Formoso, 2010). Their narrative emphasizes how residents work and struggle against the border. While insightful, this emphasis this emphasis misses the investments that residents may make in borders, and the more complicated forms of agency that arise there. In contrast, my own findings suggest that the Thai–Burma border became more tangible (as compared to artificial or illegitimate) through the practices and performances of residents.

In a slightly different vein, a third group of scholars have been considering the ways that border residents strategically use the border to better position themselves as individuals, communities, or sub-national groups, economically or politically. For example, at the Laos–Cambodia border Baird draws attention to how “the international border has served as a resource that [the Brao] have deployed to gain agency, power over space” (2010: 280; see also Formoso, 2010; Grundy-Warr & Wong, 2002; Sturgeon, 2004, 2013; Walker, 1999). Baird argues that the Brao are “making unintended use of a spatial boundary established by the state” (2010: 280; emphasis mine). Baird's analysis highlights the ways that the Brao ethnic group have used the Laos–Cambodia border to create spaces; in contrast, the arguments put forward here show a form of local involvement that actually enacts or invests in the institution of the Thai–Burma border itself.

In other words, I argue that more than making “use” of the political border, residents and other agents are integral actors in enacting the political border. Therefore, while I build on the significant contributions of Southeast Asia border studies scholarship, particularly components of it that aim to focus on the perspective of the border (rather than the center), the importance of micro-practices of the border, and the resourcefulness and agency of residents (Baird, 2010; Horstmann, 2011a; Kunstadter, 1967; Leach, 1960; Sturgeon, 2004; Turner, 2010; Schoenberger & Turner, 2008; Walker, 1999), my approach differs in two important ways. First, the conceptual framework employed here facilitates an understanding of not just how the border is strategically used but how it is continually made through *borderwork*. State-evasion and circumnavigation of border controls remain important expressions of local agency, but as I will highlight residents also express and expand their agency by drawing on, accessing and demanding better from state resources, infrastructures and institutions (see also Dean, 2005: 808 on ignoring versus resistance or Jones, 2012 on refusal

versus resistance). For instance, engaging in borderwork can be a way for residents, non-governmental organizations, and activists to better or more strongly voice concerns about or assert claims to natural resources vis-a-vis the state (see also: [Sturgeon, 2004](#)). It can also serve to advance local claims to improved personal and community security and recognition from the state. These different potential sites or concerns of agency need not be exclusive; but rather I aim to highlight this potentially overlooked view of the border as a site of agency (see also: [Walker, 1999](#)). The research I present in subsequent sections highlights the role of residents in bordering and reveals the border as site of agency and personal investment, characteristics that require incorporation into our scholarship on borders in Southeast Asia.

Second, my approach to borderwork also incorporates insights from science studies to highlight the ways that the border is co-produced by multiple actors through their performances. In this way, the political border is an institution that continually requires re-enactment, and I focus not only on the role of border residents, but the work and practice of multiple state and non-state actors within and away from borderlands. This is important to highlight because I will argue that it is the connections or convergences between multiple actors that co-produce a more tangible political border.

#### **Background on research site: multiple stories of the river-border**

Before introducing my ethnographic fieldwork data, there are details about the story of the river-border that are important to elucidate. This includes information about the border's incomplete delimitation, and about the dam developments currently proposed on and around the transboundary stretch of this river.

The Salween River makes up 120 km (81 miles) of what is understood as the present-day political border between Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand and Karen State, Burma. The border continues south another 386 km (240 miles) along a tributary of the Salween called the Moei River. This river-border was agreed upon in writing in 1834 between the British and the northern Thai kingdom at Chiangmai ([Winichakul, 1994](#): 68). It was subsequently surveyed on the ground by British officials with the help of five Karen elders, a two-year task concluded in 1849 ([Winichakul, 1994](#): 69).

Colonial rule in Burma ended in 1948, and today Thailand does not recognize this border as officially delimited. In fact, most documents report that only 60 of the approximately 2400 km of the Thai–Burma border have been physically demarcated (for instance, see: [Ball, 2004](#); [Pate, 2010](#)). During my research, this “fact” was reiterated by government officials, villagers, and soldiers in formal representations and informal conversations, and at several times a direct connection was made between the proposed energy developments and the “opportunity” they provide to clarify the border area. For instance, during the public hearings that I discuss below, a senior soldier (and member of government subcommittee on Hatgyi) referred to the proposed energy developments as “just the beginning” (hearing transcript, 9 Feb 2011) of clarifying the border.

This leads to the present-day story of the river-border: the impending development plans for the Salween. These include most pressingly the contentious Hatgyi project, a 1250 megawatt (MW) “run of river” dam expected to be the first project to be built on the Lower Salween River.<sup>6</sup> The investors for the dam include the international arm of the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT), China's Sinohydro Company, the Burmese Ministry of Hydropower and a Burmese company, IGE. I say this project is contentious because, while the electricity would be generated to

send to Thailand, the physical dam barrage is proposed on the Salween River just as it enters Karen State, Burma. There has also been conflicting and imprecise information presented by the project developers regarding the exact location and size of the project, and regarding what “run of river” means in the context of a dam that at over 1200 MW is at the large end of a class of hydroelectric installation normally construed by the public to describe much smaller plants.

These intertwined stories of development and bordering inform how we understand the river-border as it has emerged today. The development proposal for Hatgyi, as the vanguard for 4–6 other dam projects proposed along the river-border, poses questions about who and what will be impacted and how the border will be transformed. The case also reveals an opportunity to understand how residents (and others) are invested in the work and enactment of the border.

Of particular concern, the Hatgyi project threatens to displace villages located upstream along the border, in addition to those that are directly adjacent to the dam site in Burma. The border villages are majority Karen, a group about whom much has been written in Southeast Asian Studies ([Delang, 2003](#); [Horstmann, 2011a](#); [Keyes, 1979, 2003](#); [Kunstadter, 1967](#); [Kunstadter, Chapman, & Sabhasri, 1978](#); [Laungaramsri, 2002](#); [Rajah, 1990](#); [Scott, 2009](#); [Steinmetz, 1999](#); [Wijeyewardene, 1990](#); [Wilson & Hanks, 1985](#), also see [Leach, 1960](#) regarding the Karen more generally). There has been much attention paid to the refugee camps and border crossing at Mae Sot, Thailand ([Decha, 2006, 2007](#); [Grundy-Warr, 1994](#); [Grundy-Warr & Wong, 2002](#); [Hyndman, 2002](#)). My research extends this scholarship by focusing on Karen residents of settlements along the Salween, and examining their relationship to the political border.

That these communities have lived in the area for generations has been documented through their own ecological knowledge initiatives, but also by missionaries and historians ([Rajah, 1990](#): 114; [Wilson & Hanks, 1985](#)). This established position (and the need to defend it) is important when considering the motivations driving border residents to engage in borderwork.

More broadly, energy projects like Hatgyi that straddle or leapfrog borders and transboundary rivers are an emerging norm within Southeast Asia (see relevant work on Mekong dam development in this journal: [Bakker, 1999](#); [Sneddon & Fox, 2006, 2011](#)). Other energy development projects being undertaken just beyond Thai borders include the proposed Xayaburi dam on the Mekong in Laos, and the Dawei industrial estate in Burma; both are being developed with Thai funding and with the intention to export the bulk of the energy back to Thailand. Thailand has been playing a particularly important role in regional development, focusing its energy development efforts to sites at or just beyond its borders. Many understand this trend to be related to strong, sustained resistance mounted against large energy development projects by civil society groups within Thailand ([Hirsch, 2010](#); [Middleton, 2012](#)).

While the Hatgyi is a cross-border project, it is one with domestic Thai governance processes. In this way it differs from aforementioned energy developments which have not conducted public information sessions in Thailand. Related to civil society resistance, these development projects, and the participatory governance processes that must legally accompany them in Thailand, have often generated a standoff between those supporting the project (EGAT in particular, but other dam developers as well) and “opponent” NGOs and village representatives. Indeed, dam development is a polarized issue, one that for many “epitomises the dilemma found at the heart of development” ([Middleton, 2010](#): 466).

Yet, in my assessment the story of the river-border is much too messy to be contained by the clean narrative that there are simply

actors working for or against development. Many actors are simultaneously involved in several overlapping processes, including the participatory development process of the Hatgyi dam, and advocacy for or against the proposed Salween dams. These and other concerns have these actors engaging with and at times performing and enacting different institutions such as the state (in the guise of its various responsibilities to know and act in this district) and the political border itself. A variety of disparate motivations drive these actors as they enact—or co-produce—the border, and I draw these out further in my discussion.

## Methods

Research was conducted over one year (2010–2011) in Thai, Karen, and English languages, with the help of a Thai and Karen speaking research assistant. This article is informed by participant observation conducted at villages along the Salween River, and at a series of public information hearings about the proposed Hatgyi dam.<sup>7</sup> I also observed and participated in NGO network meetings in Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai, and Bangkok. I interviewed EGAT officers and environmental consultants in their Bangkok offices, in addition to recording their presentations and the discussions that followed at the meetings for which they traveled to the border. The public information hearings I participated in were organized by a Thai government-appointed subcommittee,<sup>8</sup> which had been established to distribute and discuss information about the dam in line with Thai constitutional requirements for community rights. In these hearings, the environmental impact assessment (EIA) was the principal reference for this public information and engagement effort, and from these hearings I will discuss in particular the borderwork of the environmental consultants hired to conduct this EIA.

In sum, I conducted 107 informal and semi-structured interviews with local residents, government officials, staff from the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT), activists, and scientists. Interviewees were chosen based on a number of factors. First, two villages at the border were chosen for this research based on preliminary visits conducted in 2009. Within each village I selected a sample of interviewees who: lived in different “neighbourhoods” (in Thai, *moo*) and who were of different religious backgrounds (Buddhist, Animist and Christian) and I made sure to include residents who had and *had not* participated in recent participatory projects, which I discuss more below. The government officials I interviewed were responsible for the border area at the village, district, and provincial levels, and I interviewed all the EGAT staff, environmental consultants, and government subcommittee members who were associated with the Hatgyi dam project in 2010–2011. I also interviewed nearly all available NGO staff and directors who work in the Salween River-border area. To conduct the semi-structured interviews I relied on a set of questions as starting point but the interviews were tailored to suit particular individuals and sometimes altered to follow the lines of conversation and current events (Lamb, 2014a). Interviews were recorded whenever possible and detailed notes were taken for all interviews in a research notebook.

Many people I met during my research at first assumed or asked if I was one of two groups: a tourist interested in authentic Karen traditions, or a missionary proselytizing the Christian faith. I identified as a doctoral researcher interested in knowledge and environment of the Salween River-border. I also discussed with interviewees my past experience, since 2003, working and conducting research with organizations and networks following regional environment and development issues. I relied on this experience to facilitate interviews and introductions to village headmen and government officials.

In addition to participant observation and interviews, I also collected and reviewed documents emerging from several distinct projects that aimed to record ways of knowing about the environment, including “Salween Villager Research” (SEARIN, 2005). To analyze these interviews, texts and field observations, I used both descriptive and thematic coding. The transcripts and translations from Thai to English are my own but in some instances translations was done with support from my research assistants. In what follows, I selectively draw on this fieldwork, highlighting ethnographic fragments (Tsing, 2005: 271), in order to demonstrate my main arguments about border making.

## The work of the border

### *Borderwork and border residents: villager research*

One way in which people residing at the border are important in addressing questions of how borders are enacted and remade emerged through narrations of village histories. This is evident in the ways that various villages along the river documented and are proud of how they have established committees to specifically monitor the border area, and to decide who is allowed to build houses or move to these villages (see also Rajah, 1990: 126 citing Renard 1980 regarding Karen people assigned frontier-watch responsibilities). Anyone moving to these villages from Burma or other parts of Thailand must apply to these committees.

I first heard about these committees in 2011, when an NGO-led group came to visit the village I was staying in. Several men who had participated in a local knowledge project called Villager Research (more below) were narrating their village’s history to the group. One man drew a rough map on a board and explained how the village center had shifted over time, but that villagers were still able to maintain important relationships with Thai officials (field notes, June 2011).

A student member of the group asked how the village accommodates or deals with refugees coming from Burma who want to be a part of the village. The village headman explained that “For those who are relatives or want to marry, we consider them on a case by case basis. But, when a group of people come—like refugees—we send them to the refugee camp.” He further explained that they could register for UN cards in the camp, and that he did not want the Thai authorities to see their village as a place that people fleeing from Burma come to in order to obtain Thai citizenship, because this would discredit the village, something “that would hurt everyone in the village” (transcript from recording of meeting/field notes July 2011).

In the context of this paper, these committees are important because they help maintain the border villages as an orderly part of the Thai state. In one discussion, the formation of such committees was compared with one village’s decision to construct fencing around house plots in order to indicate ownership, and eventually land title. Both the committees and the fences were considered examples that show that this is a legitimate and orderly village. The presence of the committee in particular illustrated that the village would not just let anyone (i.e., migrants or refugees from the Burmese side of the border) establish residence. This kind of gate-keeping activity undertaken here contrasts with what might be conventionally understood as the state’s obligation to enforce or control the border.

Another headman explained that his own village had an important national role, that they were the gate between Burma and this district of Thailand. He emphasized that, “We are the eyes and ears [of the district]; it is important to have people in this village as gatekeepers at the border” (Field notes, June 2011). His positioning aimed to reinforce the legitimacy of his border-

community within Thailand, but also demonstrates how residents are doing the work of the state to recognize, represent, and reinforce the border. Instead of more traditional narratives (both scholarly and local) that might describe his community as having been bordered, the headman and his fellow residents are clearly invested in the borderwork.

Through a participatory project called Villager Research (*ngan wiijay* [Research] *thai baan* [Villager, in Isan dialect]), local residents from 50 villages in the Salween basin along the Thai–Burma border are formally documenting their village histories, along with local livelihood ecologies, for publication in books and videos. Villager Research “relies on direct involvements and knowledge of grass-roots villagers for explanation on various relevant issues with support from environmental NGOs as research assistants” (SEARIN, 2005: page 1 of executive summary). The Villager Research methodology posits that local people know more than “outsiders” about their histories and the ecological resources they use regularly, and that thus they should be the lead researchers in documenting a kind of natural and social history of the area potentially impacted by the proposed dams. As part of the research process, NGO staff take photographs and notes as research assistants and work together with “villagers” (*thai baan* or *chao baan*) while information is collected, systematized, and written down. These natural histories are then re-told/re-presented for interested individuals and groups, and circulated as text within Thailand and internationally.

The majority of the residents participating in Villager Research at the Salween River-border are Karen. It is important to note that within Thailand, the Karen have been precariously characterized as both “guardians” of the forest and “nature’s destroyers” (Forsyth & Walker, 2008; see also Delang, 2003). The latter characterization blames them for destroying the forest for agricultural gain, while their vaguely positive idealization as caretakers of nature imposes its own unfair burden to be responsible for Thailand’s natural resources. Imposed notions of guardianship inevitably facilitate further blame when the forest is used by locals and non-locals alike.

Similar characterizations prevail in water management, where Walker (2003) argues that blame for drought or lack of water has been fixed on people in upland areas, many of whom are ethnic minorities while leaving the lowland side of demand and water management issues unaddressed. The Karen—along with other ethnic groups including the Hmong and Akha—are more commonly referred to as “hill peoples” (*chao khao*) rather than villagers (*chao baan*), characterizations that are built on long-held understandings that the people living in the borderlands and uplands of Southeast Asia existed disconnected from the center. The prevalence of such characterizations has sparked discussion about the ethnic-ized and racialized lines of “insider/outsider,” particularly in Thailand (Vanderveest, 2003).

In contrast to that positioning of Karen residents as outsiders, in the Villager Research project they are considered “villagers”. The incorporation of Karen peoples along the Salween as “villagers” through this collaborative research project is a significant move to an “insider” position, and one that adjusts their position to both village and nation-state boundaries.

I also saw Karen residents positioning themselves as “insiders” in the process of creating maps and borders in this Villager Research. For instance, a series of maps titled “Ecological systems of the Salween River, Thai–Burma border”<sup>9</sup> show information about important ecosystems documented through Villager Research (see Fig. 2). The map includes data points indicating where rapids, whirlpools, riverbank gardens, waterfalls, houses, and piers are located; of great interest however is the intentional focus in both the title and the map image on the political border. The border and the river are intricately linked as one line and made the center of focus for each map, and then accentuated by the absence of

indicators marking important ecological systems on the Burmese side of the border. In fact, Karen State, Burma, where the dam would also have impacts, is represented as a blank white space. This raises several questions, but for the purpose of this discussion the image serves to reinforce a national boundary that many have argued is rather arbitrary.<sup>10</sup> It certainly highlights the river-border’s significance in the everyday life experiences documented in Villager Research. However, it also shows the “borderlanders”, the declared authors of these Villager Research maps, taking a bordering role other than resistance or circumnavigation. Throughout this research project, they were the ones drawing and emphasizing the border’s hard line.

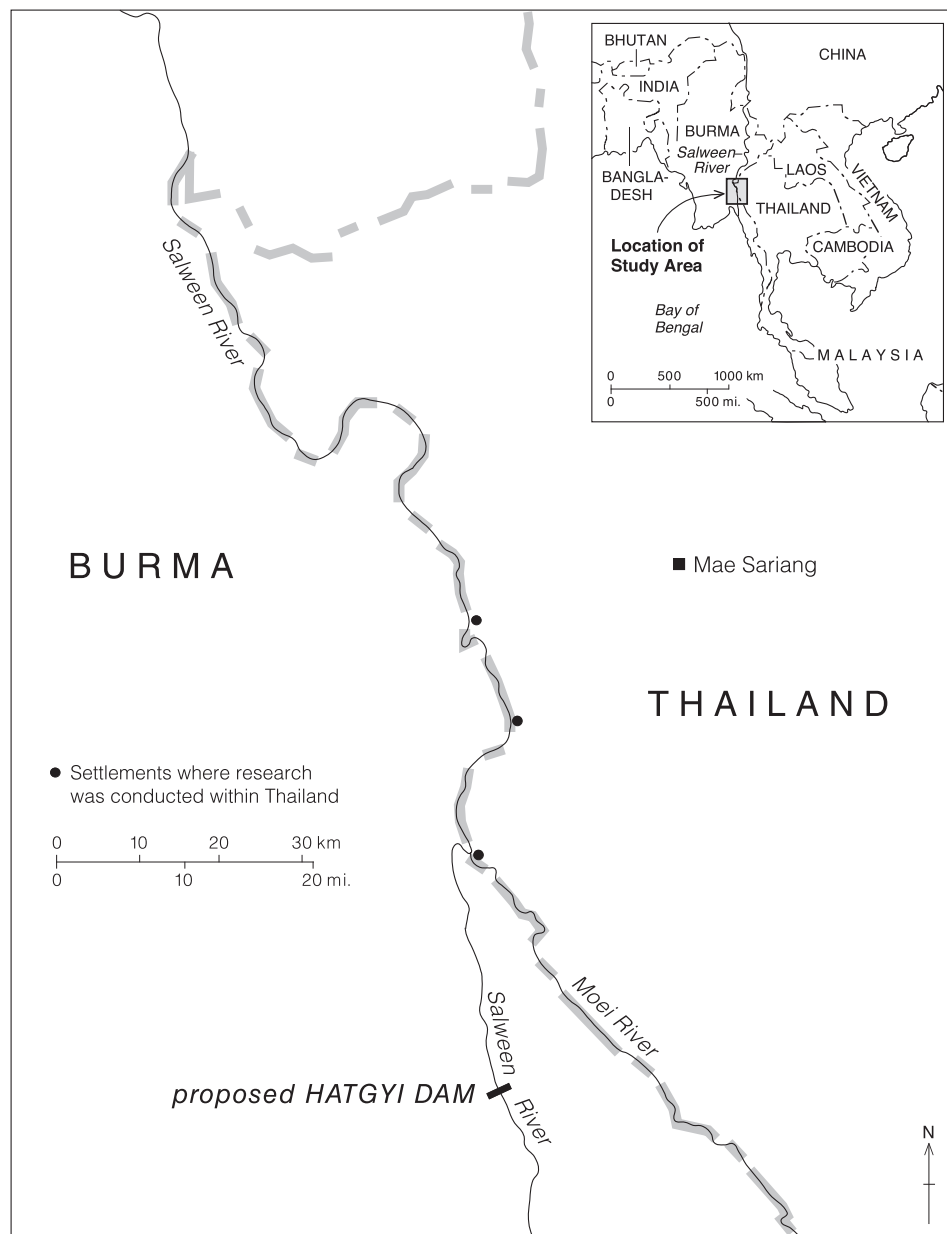
Through their own histories and map making, residents are positioning themselves and important aspects of their lives as related to the border and to Thailand. At times, residents actually maintain the political border as gatekeepers and take pride in this role, and at other times they perform the river-border as a significant part of their research and their understanding of the river. Highlighting the residents’ role as agents in protecting, mapping, and narrating the history of the border in their collaborations with NGO staff not only shows how the border might be seen as something more than just imposed by outsiders, but also demonstrates that there is desire among these residents for their borderwork to be recognized. Local residents are portrayed in these narratives not as people separate from the border and from the state, but as agents doing the work or the operation of the political border.

#### *Borderwork and environmental consultants*

Environmental consultants have also been drawn into the remaking of the Thai–Burma border, through their paid work—in this instance the borderwork is literally contracted work, even if the contractors’ responsibilities in regards to the border are rarely formally registered. Below, a selection of examples illustrate the material implications of the borderwork done by environmental consultants from the Environmental Research Institute at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, hired to conduct the environmental impact assessment (EIA) of the Hatgyi project (ERI, 2008). Their work through the EIA and subsequent presentations to remake the border as something more “fixed” also has governance implications, and speaks to their motivations in engaging in borderwork.

The scope of the Hatgyi EIA was very broad and included study of social, environmental, and health impacts. As noted above, the Hatgyi project as proposed would be constructed on the main-stream of the Salween River, near to the Thai–Burma border and the Thai provinces of Tak and Mae Hong Son. The specifics are complicated: the physical dam barrage would be located downstream of the portion of the river that serves as the border, with both sides of the dam located in Karen State, Burma (see Fig. 1 Study site). Public representations of the EIA depict the dam’s expected flood impacts as contained to Burmese territory. The Hatgyi EIA summary booklet distributed to residents in Thailand shows that the reservoir will be contained to the Burmese side of the political border, indicating that the water level will be raised until just a few meters before the river becomes the political border. There are detailed reports that conflict with the EIA’s interpretations of expected impacts to Thailand (NHRC-T, 2009) but in sum: the impacts to the border and to Thailand represent a point of contention.

Within the EIA, the consultants have gone as far as to leave Thailand off the map (ERI, 2008: 5–6), scaling the maps to show only the Salween River inside Burma, and, for instance, *not* the river-border as was the focus of the Villager Research maps.<sup>11</sup> In tandem with staff from EGAT, the lead environmental consultant made clear statements in his presentation at the public information hearings that it was not even necessary to carry out an in-depth



**Fig. 1.** Site of research at the Salween River-border and location of proposed Hatgyi dam. The location of the proposed dam and some well-known villages in Thailand are indicated, but do not in any way represent all settlements in the border area. Map created by Carolyn King.

impact study on the Thai side of the border, as they had established that there would be no impacts to Thailand (public information hearing notes 9 Feb 2011).<sup>12</sup> These moves to discount cross-border impacts of dams is not unique, as documented in other cases in the region, notably the Yali Falls dam (Hirsch & Wyatt, 2004; Wyatt & Baird, 2007). Indeed, conditions in which the projected ecological impacts would stop at the political border are particularly fortunate for the Hatgyi project's future success. If the project was found to have any impacts that might affect the political border, then by Thai law it would require parliamentary debate and approval.

The consultant's concerns and reiteration that ecological impacts stop at the border is part of a response that attempts to enact the political border in a particular way. Solidifying the political border not only as something *there*, but as a firm barrier to environmental consequences, the report delivered by the environmental consultants stands out as a powerful piece of border-work. By not mapping the river-border and by insisting to

attendees of the hearings that the dam would not have impacts on the Thai portion of the river system, the consultants offered a vision of the border as a physical barrier that even fish do not cross (see also: Baird, 2011; Sneddon, 2007). As much as these were public information hearings, a key audience for this vision of the dam and the border were the state officials who participated in the decision-making processes within the Hatgyi Subcommittee and the local district officials who helped to organize the hearings (field notes Feb 2011). The role of the environmental consultant is not only to generate information about the proposed project's impacts, but to package it for this audience so that it is deemed to be truthful and trustworthy.

Environmental consultants work in a contractual relationship with their employer, in this case the project developer EGAT, and they need to position their work relative to the aims of their employer and to the expectations of the broader consultant market (see also: Fisher, 2008; Goldman, 2001). As professionals hired to



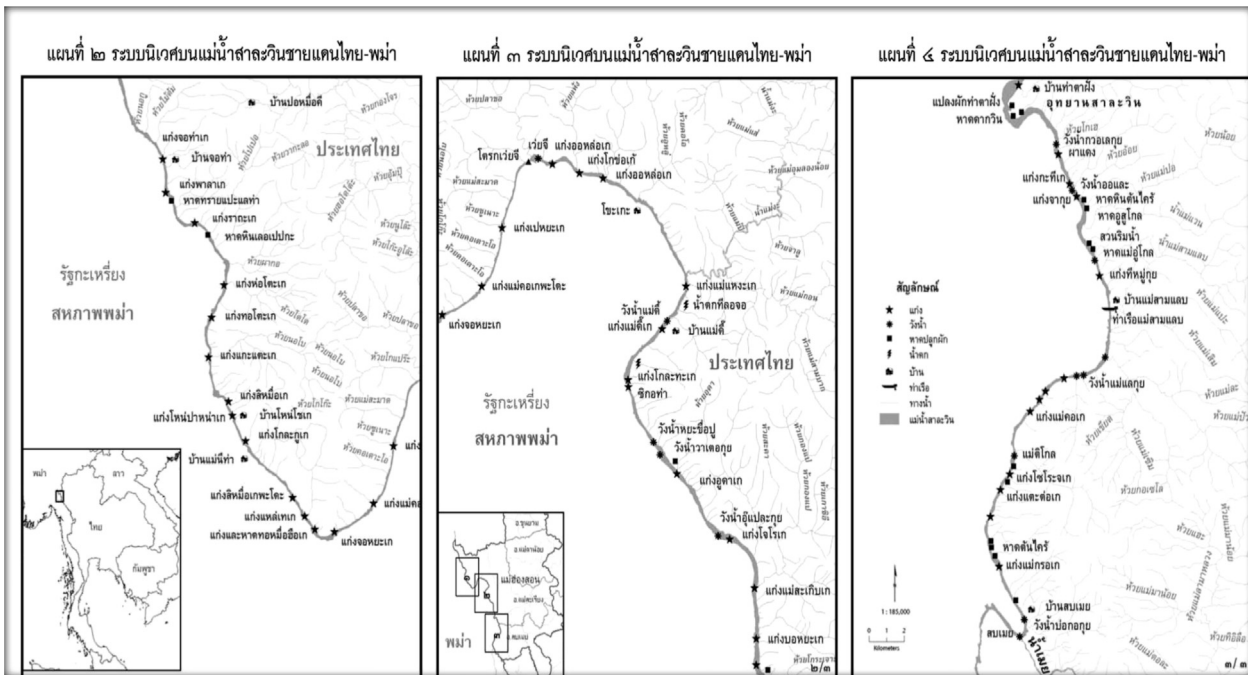


Fig. 2. These maps from SEARIN (2005) are titled “Ecological systems of the Salween River, Thai–Burma border” maps 2, 3, and 4. The legend on the map to the right includes the following: rapids (star), whirlpools (asterisks), riverbank gardens (square), waterfalls (zigzag), houses (house), piers (boat), waterways (lighter line), and Salween River (thicker gray line).

deliver a report, their livelihoods are intimately related to the project and to the ideas about the border that it requires and embodies. Whether or not the Hatgyi consultants can meet the demands and unwritten expectations of their present contract with the Thai Electrical Authority will have implications not only for their immediate income but also for their future prospects to win contracts on other projects in the region.

Moreover, imagining the political border as a physical barrier has material implications for decision-making, and for the role of local residents in Thailand, particularly those residing along the Salween River-border who conducted the Villager Research project. The borderwork of environmental consultants may demonstrate that residents do not have a legitimate, impact-based claim to participate in formal decision-making processes. If the EIA maintains that the area in which they live will not be impacted, then their knowledge and their participation can be discounted from formal decision-making processes; even sympathetic decision-makers may find it difficult to keep their arguments on the table.

Hatgyi is not the first dam in the region where people outside of the dam reservoir area have been defined in the project EIA as not “directly impacted” (see also: Baird, 2009). In spite of this, “villagers” have been encouraged to participate in meetings and to “have their say”. The consultant team has even included consultations with residents in Burma and Thailand on their own initiative and referenced Villager Research in the EIA. However, rather than informing concrete decisions about the dam, in my assessment the meetings were performed primarily to enroll residents in the process and to assure them that those in Thailand would not be impacted by the proposed development. Much of this relies on a co-production of the political border as something fixed and secure.

*Information for the public: where is the border?*

The decision of the Thai government to conduct a series of public information hearings in early 2011 brought a new dimension to this research and offers another venue to think about

performance and co-production of knowledge and authority. While stakeholder hearings to discuss development projects are an increasingly common part of participatory decision-making processes in the region, these hearings provided a unique space and process for multiple actors (borderland and non-borderland, officials and non-governmental organizations) to come together to discuss ecological knowledge, development, and the political border. The performances during the hearings are important for understanding how borderwork is carried out among multiple actors.

The meetings were held in northwest Thailand in February 2011, in border villages and administrative centers, and aimed to provide information to the public about the Hatgyi dam. One hearing that took place away from the border, in the district capital, was particularly significant both in terms of how borderwork was carried out at non-border locations, and in the way that other actors could be seen to carry out borderwork alongside border residents.<sup>13</sup>

At one point, audience questions turned directly to the border. An older man with a red Karen bag over his shoulder asked the question that this article began with, “where is the border?” I heard the question as a kind of understated provocation. The undercurrent to his question was evidenced by the large discussion it sparked in the room: he did not trust that the people conducting the hearing were familiar with the everyday management of the border. This resonated with what I heard in informal interviews with local residents, who repeatedly expressed that even the Thai military (the *Thahan Prawn*, or Border Rangers, in particular) did not “know” the border and enforced limited control of it. As my research assistant suggested to me quietly, “They [Thai government] don’t even know about or how to control the border now—how are they going to build and manage a big project like this?”

These sentiments resonate with scholarship that has shown that Thai state invests very little in protection of the Thai–Burma border. This has been written about with regard to illegal logging, attacks on refugees, and military corruption (Ball, 2004). In Desmond Ball’s assessment, instead of protecting and maintaining the

border, the Thai Border Rangers, charged with upholding Thai sovereignty at the border, “may well have colluded with the DKBA [Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, in Karen State, Burma] in some of the flagrant violations of Thai sovereignty” (2004:5; see also Poopat, 1998; for analysis of sovereign authority and political borders see also: Jones, 2009; Shewly, 2013).

In the public information hearing, a response to this question of “Where is the border?” was given by a member of the military in uniform, who was also a member of the government subcommittee. As noted earlier, he emphasized that this project was an opportunity to clearly delineate the political border, finishing with a rather ambiguous concession about the Thai–Burma border, that “...at present, ... only 500 kilometers are clear[ly delimited]; there are still 2,400 kilometers that have not yet been surveyed. This is just the beginning” (hearing transcript, 9 Feb 2011).

While the question and its response emphasized the limited enforcement that the Thai state undertakes at the border and the opportunity for development to delimit the border, it also drew people into a heated discussion about how to better secure the political border. Further concerns such as “taking our land”, “not enough land and water for everyone”, and “lack of resources to support more people in the province” were raised by those in attendance. These concerns reflect anxiety from residents, NGO activists, and government officials about the dam contributing to refugees crossing the border into Thailand because of the Hatgyi project; all emphasized a need or desire for the border's fixity. Briefly, I want to flag that there are problems with the assumption that dam construction will directly contribute to “illegal migrant workers” or “refugees” crossing into Thailand. The links are not so clear or simple (Latt, 2009). In addition, relying on and mobilizing Thai anxiety about refugees and migrant workers from Burma is an act that obfuscates other concerns about residents' access to natural resources.

Moreover, referring to “people over there,” “migrant workers,” and “refugees,” speaker after speaker at the public information hearing reaffirmed the border's existence because even as border crossers themselves, the hypothetical migrants that they were concerned with were represented *solely* through their relationship to that border, in effect reinforcing its fixity. Bearing in mind larger discussions of bordering is important in thinking through the multifaceted role of residents in borderwork and the motivations for bordering, and particularly how it might be advantageous to “get your borderwork in first” (Rumford, 2008a, 2008b: 8).

Central to this paper, the villagers, NGO activists, and government officials at the meeting continually articulated terms and ideas that express or affirm a certain integrity for the border, whether that integrity is seen to exist or as something to be desired. In part, these concerns are an expression of events that have occurred over the past two decades, in which villages along the Salween River-border have witnessed and been affected by the conflict between the Karen National Union and the DKBA, and where refugee camps have been placed on the agricultural land of farmers in this province (without compensation), providing impetus for and evidence confirming broadly held fears of “outsiders”. Environmental and human rights activists attending these hearings have picked up on these points because they have seen that this is an issue that has traction with governments and with the public (both Thai and international), that a project might *not* receive support if it may contribute to movements of migrant workers and refugees.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, these concerns are also of interest because they play on the history of conflict between Thailand and Burma—a spectre which still occupies minds today.

In the case of the public information hearings, and in my research experience more generally, a tension existed where multiple actors made claims to and about the border. The main point I

argue here is that it is *through* the connections—in the overlap in voicing concerns about impacts or migrants and refugees for instance, or more broadly through general calls for “securing the border”—that the border is actually remade or “co-produced”. In fact, the border might be seen to be made *more tangible* through this exchange of concerns regarding the border's integrity than in originally conjured ideas of the border as “not officially delimited”. More than simply documenting the border, these maps, performances, articulations, and presentations show how consultants, government officials and residents are involved in the *work* of the political border.

### Discussion: implications of and motivations for borderwork

This research conducted at the Salween border highlights the role of residents, consultants, and other actors in bordering, and it reveals the border as site of personal investment. These are characteristics that require incorporation into our scholarship on borders in Southeast Asia. The approach taken here—borders as work—complicates the “imposed” notion of borders, to emphasize how the work of individuals matters to the maintenance of the institution of the political border.

Through presenting ethnographic fragments I also intend to raise questions about the motivations that drive individuals to continually enact or invest in the political border, and the implications of their participation. I caution against the easy assertion that this approach or others that aim to understand “borders from the bottom up” necessarily result in or demonstrate evidence of more dynamic, or even more democratic political borders (Doevenspeck, 2011: 140; Newman, 2006; and also Rumford, 2008a, 2008b: 8).

Indeed, a variety of motivations may encourage the enactment of the political border through its portrayal by villagers in Thailand. In some cases, local residents may simply be utilizing the representations of an existing map as a foundation for their Villager Research project. In other contexts, residents may be motivated to bolster their individual and communal claims to land, and their access to or control over resources, by positioning themselves and their livelihoods on the “right” side of the border through performances of “Thai” histories. As Sturgeon notes, within the Greater Mekong Subregion, “To the extent that minorities have become successful [in forging transboundary relationships and trade], these outcomes may be fragile and transitory” (2013: 8). Recent work by Sturgeon (2013, see also: Fujita Lagerqvist, 2013; Turner, 2013) demonstrate how this is an ongoing site of effort and struggle in the region, emphasizing not only the political borders of nation-states, but that there is possible application and borderwork of regional proportions as well.

In the case of the Hatgyi project, the positioning of residents as agents at the border is particularly significant in the face of their possible relocation if the dam is built and impacts do occur in Thailand. However, I would also argue that it is more complex; the statements and activities of village headmen and other community members in operating and policing their community's exposure to the border appear to go beyond simply “saying the right things.” They point to incentives for marginalized communities to invest in reinforcing the border that often go unrecognized by scholars and activists. For instance, there could be benefits not only for access to land titles and resources, but also for claims to citizenship in Thailand and access to state infrastructures (such as education or electricity). The village committee I mentioned also represents an opportunity to remake the border area and the village in tune with the needs or practices of local residents.

As noted, environmental consultants also make choices in positioning their work relative to the goals and the contractual

obligations of their employer (see also: Fisher, 2008; Goldman, 2001). The consultants' livelihoods, represented not only in immediate income from this project but also in their future work in the region, are also intimately related to the project and to the ideas about the border that it requires and embodies. And yet, again in this case the work of environmental consultants and their investment in public information hearings *after* their report was already produced makes this about more than simply "saying the right things." Environmental consultants also raised issues of border security which resonates with residents' concerns and motivations for a more secure political border.

In some ways, the borderwork of residents, environmental consultants, and the government subcommittee coincided in how the border was imagined. Notions of fixity and of the border as a site for control and as a barrier—keeping fish, ecological impacts, or migrants out of Thailand, or at least secured on the other side of the border—were reiterated in interviews, hearings, and maps. Considering that the border is referenced as not officially delimited, through this process the political border in some ways came to be presented as more fixed and potentially more exclusionary than was previously understood by environmental governance participants. This is similar to the findings of Sidaway (2002: 141) who, examining the Portuguese–Spanish border, contends that "what makes the border real and worthy of cartographic designation is that the representation on the map coincides with other systems of representation in which the border is narrated, cited and reiterated." At the Salween border, for instance, at the conclusion of the public information hearing a further agenda for study of the river-border was made, with the various stakeholders involved recognizing that delimiting and securing the border was an important part of the project.

Security matters because it is one clear motivation for bordering. There are other motivations as noted above, but I was surprised by how seamlessly the different performances of border security coalesced. This was evident in the public information hearing in particular, where multiple actors—who might be assumed to have contrary views about both the fixity of the political border and the links that tie it to development—actually saw their concerns overlap. The discussions and documentations of the border through these meetings transformed the way that residents and others articulated their connection to or investments in the political border. This was documented through the hearing, where concerns about security and the border were also elevated through this process. Such performances and practices highlighted the significance of the investments that residents and environmental consultants were making in the border. It became clear that as village histories were performed for students, NGOs, and state officials, that residents performed the border in particular ways and put forward particular imaginings of the Thai (and to a lesser extent, Burmese) nation-state.

The level of engagement by environmental consultants in reworking the political border was also initially surprising to me. Rather than a group of disinterested academics, the lead consultant and his team seemed to be eagerly engaged in the ways that the political border was and would be enacted. Casting these performances of the border together, they more clearly highlight the border as an institution or process that needs to be enacted, a node of struggle to be invested in. This is an important contribution gained through conceptualizing the border as "work" drawing on work in political geography and science studies.

The arguments presented here also contribute to the emerging work conceptualizing the border at and across multiple sites and scales, such as across South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Himalayas (Cons & Sanyal, 2013; Fujita Lagerqvist, 2013; Harris, 2013; Jones, 2012; van Schendel, 2002; Sturgeon, 2013; Turner, 2013).

However, I maintain that important differences exist between these contexts; for instance, while Cons and Sanyal argue that borders and borderlands have been seen as "central" to the "imaginings and understandings of South Asia" (2013: 6), assessment of my research of the Thai–Burma border and the long-standing literature on Southeast Asia borders shows a history of resistance and marginalization.

In conclusion, the ethnographic work presented here highlights how border residents can engage as actors in bordering and at the same time, have their actions be influenced by the borderwork of others such as environmental consultants. This, I argue, is the strength of examining borders through the lens of borderwork, particularly with an emphasis on 'practice': it becomes clear how a variety of actors are involved in the co-production of the border through the interplay between knowing and performing the border at multiple sites and scales. Moreover, the argument put forward here is not simply that residents are enrolled in operating the state's borders, but that they along with environmental consultants and government officials are engaged in enacting and re-performing the political border. The emphasis here on the actions and performances of multiple actors in bordering in turn de-emphasizes the border as a state-centric institution that crosses, rather than engages, individuals and institutions. Taken together, the conceptual approach and ethnographic data reaffirm that borders are accomplishments which necessitate work at multiple sites and scales.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This question was raised during a Thai government Subcommittee hearing in 2011 to discuss the proposed Hatgyi dam. These hearings were organized by a Thai government subcommittee appointed by the Prime Minister's Office during the Abhisit government. The full title is: "Public information disclosure and hearing in the case of the Hatgyi dam on the Salween River, Burma." I discuss this meeting in more detail below.

<sup>2</sup> I use the term actor to mean individual agents inspired by the work of Latour (1999, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> This notion of borders as imposed, and Siam Mapped in particular, have received critique for over-generalizing, and not taking into account local perspectives in boundary making and instead privileging the elite center (most recently Baird, 2008; but see also: reviews and critiques in Duara, 1995; Hewison, 1995; Walker, 1999; Wijeyewardene, 1991). While not arguing against Winichakul's main thesis, Wijeyewardene did offer critique that "the traditional notions of borders are more complicated and better defined than he [Winichakul] appreciates" (1991: 169).

<sup>4</sup> In 1968, Lamb argued that "At the moment of European colonial impact, it would not have been easy to point to any stable delimited or demarcated boundary in mainland South-east Asia, even though the location of the centres of the power in the region was clear enough" (1968: 42). This notion of 'imposed borders' is brought out in Edmund Leach's (1960) paper 'The Frontiers of "Burma"'. Leach provocatively asked if – in Southeast Asia – frontiers existed at all? (1960: 49). The notion of frontier Leach was critiquing was the "European myth" of the frontier as a "line on the map (and on the ground) marking the exact division between two adjacent states" (1960: 49). In the present day, this might be more akin to a political boundary or border, rather than a frontier; although these are not mutually exclusive (Sahlins, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Zomia is considered a large region of Asia that was largely ignored by scholars post-WW2 because it was "politically ambiguous"; van Schendel (2002) explains that this region – largely the borderlands or uplands (as opposed to the heartlands) were both invisible and liminal, they lacked strong central state structures and have been more or less framed as peripheries by scholars, particular scholars of

specialists within 'Asia'. Geographically this would include the Thai–Burma border region. The term has been made more popular by Scott's (2009) arguments that rather than being "left behind" these peripheral regions have left the state behind or have "evaded" the state. While Scott makes the disclaimer that his argument only applies up until the 1950s many scholars have found his arguments useful in the present day.

<sup>6</sup> In the hydropower industry, the term "run-of-river" is used to designate dams that do not have large storage reservoirs. Another way this has been explained is that the amount of water running "in" to the dam is the same as the amount of water running "out" within a specified time period, i.e., 48 h. This would mean there would be some water storage and water levels would be altered, but again, not a large reservoir. Run-of-river dams are normally regulated by dams upstream with large storage reservoirs, which raises further questions about future developments on the Salween basin.

<sup>7</sup> In this paper, I mainly focus on Thailand for a variety of reasons including access to information, time constraints, and language. This represents a kind of borderwork as well, which I do not have space to explore in this article.

<sup>8</sup> The full name is "Sub-committee to Study Information and Present Comments on the Various Impacts Including Human Rights Abuses in the case of the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand's proposed Hatgyi Dam Project on the Salween River in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar."

<sup>9</sup> See maps 2–4 in Salween Villager Research (SEARIN, 2005), [www.livingriversiam.org/sw/sw\\_tb\\_book3map.pdf](http://www.livingriversiam.org/sw/sw_tb_book3map.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> This also points to how a history of violence and conflict has potentially unmade the space of Karen State to many of the Karen in Thailand. However, conflict, human rights, and violence are explicitly *not* part of Villager Research, as was explained to me by researchers and NGO research assistants alike: there was an intentional silence on this issue because of the way that any talk of human rights tends to overshadow 'environmental' issues.

<sup>11</sup> At the time of writing, the Hatgyi EIA (ERI, 2008) has not been made available to the public. EGAT officials explained that the version I have reviewed, which is titled Final Report, is not necessarily the finished product.

<sup>12</sup> Although I do not discuss Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) directly within this paper, there are two EGAT entities associated with this project: EGAT and EGAT-international, both of which are state-owned and thus, most would consider government officials.

<sup>13</sup> These public meetings were significant in that they brought together different groups to directly speak about and address concerns regarding the political border. As I examine elsewhere (Lamb, 2014b), local residents were not asked to speak about the political border in other contexts.

<sup>14</sup> Refugee camps are sites of relevant borderwork, but I do not address the issue in this article.

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