

**Riverine Border Practices: People's Everyday Lives
on the Thai-Lao Mekong Border**

by

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ABSTRACT

Pluralities of people's crossings of the Mekong Thai-Lao border occur as locals subvert, reject, ignore, and embrace the logic of the national border. From a state-centric point of view, the everyday movements of these people, who rely mainly on a subsistence economy and have their own modes of crossing, are undocumented. I argue that people's mobility co-exists with the practice of sedentary assumption. The aim of this thesis is to promote theory related to the Third Space in Borderland Studies by the presentation and analysis of people's pluralities in border-crossings. The borderland area of *Khong Chiam* (Thailand)-*Sanasomboun* (Lao PDR) is the location of an in-between state in which spatial negotiations, temporal negotiations, and negotiations of political subjectivities contribute to the nature of mobility in the Third Space. To achieve the objective of this thesis, ethnographic methodology was used over six months of fieldwork from March to September 2016, and included participant observations, interviews and essay-readings that involved 110 participants in the borderland site. People's movements across the Mekong River border occur daily without formal state approval. From the perspective of the *Thai Ban*, the river is a lived space in which they catch food and use for transport. However, their interpretation of the Mekong as the state boundary does not completely disappear. This thesis examines the everyday banal pluralities of the *Thai Ban*'s border-crossings by weaving together the three concepts of space, temporality, and negotiations of political subjectivities. The spatial and temporal negotiations involved in the border-crossings shape and are shaped by this other interpretation of the Mekong as a lived space, and different political subjectivities contribute to the pluralities of the crossings. The presentation of these pluralities of border-crossings adds to Borderland Studies specifically and the social sciences in general in the development of an understanding of the Third Space. As this thesis focuses on people's mobility at quasi-state checkpoints and in areas along the Mekong Thai-Lao border with no border checkpoints, it is suggested that future research examines the everyday practices of border-crossings at land borders.

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Upon the completion of this doctoral dissertation, it is necessary for me to state my gratitude to some important people and institutions.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AEC	ASEAN Economic Community
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
CBS	Critical Border Studies
CCTV	Closed Circuit Television
EQJDC	Economic Quadrangle Joint Development Corporation
EU	European Union
EUROSUR	European Border Surveillance System
FAT	Football Association of Thailand
GB	Great Britain
GMS	Greater Mekong Sub-region
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
ID	Identification
IR	International Relations as a discipline
IRCA	Immigration Reform and Contract Act
M.L.	The King's grandchildren
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NSC	National Security Council
PDR	People's Democratic Republic
RTP	Registered Traveller Programme
UAV	Unmanned Aviation Vehicles
UK	United Kingdom
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
US	United States

Chapter 1 - Introduction and background

1.1. Introduction

Traditional Border Studies in the first half of the twentieth century viewed borders as barriers (Semple, 1911). This idea was often reflected in traditional international political theories in the following decades, as shown by Herz who described state territorial borders as “hard-shell” (1959, p. 40). Even in the new millennium, Mearsheimer continued this idea of a border as the frame of a self-contained box in describing a state as a “black box” (2001, p.11). This spatial conceptualisation was observed in the mapping of the world and this sterile and sedentary process was defined by Mezzadra and Neilson (2013, p. 27) as “fabrica mundi.” According to this, people are fixed to given territories and delimited by state boundaries, and crossing requires the approval of the state. Ludden (2003, p. 1070) therefore urgently called for the need to critique the fact that people’s mobility is secondary to state boundaries, and proposed that, to solve this problem, “intersections of mobility and territorialism” should be the focus of analysis.

Accordingly, I propose the notion of the Third Space in the borderland to show the pluralities of intersections of people’s mobility and existence of national territory. The concept of Third Space, which will be discussed more in Chapter 2, was coined by Bhabha (1991) and Soja (1996) who used the term to refer to the stage of a cultural transition. Bhabha (1991) used it to describe the situation in which a culture shapes and is shaped by other cultures. Meanwhile, Soja (1996, p.3) described Third Space as the “a shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances and meanings”. The term Third Space was afterwards used to describe the situation in borderlands by Nail (2016) who talked about the ambiguous situation that occurs in the areas of both sides divided by the physical edge of the state. Nail’s proposal that problematises the boundary that separates two national spaces is the key concept employed in this thesis. Similar to the use of the concept of Third Space by Nail (2016), I argue that theoretical conceptualisation attached to rigid borders is inadequate by examining the case of the riverine border of Thailand and Lao People’s Democratic Republic (PDR) (see Picture 1 on page 3). The territory does

not simply separate two national spaces but bridges them at the same time. Therefore, borderland as a space of its own exists (Goodhand, 2005, 2008). As with the concepts of spatial and temporal negotiations and political subjectivities, the idea of Third Space is used in my thesis to clarify the in-betweenness of borderlands. In this borderland, there are pluralities of border-crossings in which people reject, subvert, and embrace the existence of territory. I propose this as an alternative to mainstream views of Border Studies that considers borders from a state-centric standpoint.

I examine the borderland in *Khong Chiam* (Thailand) and *Sanasomboun* (Lao PDR). The concept of *Thai Ban* spatial practices in riverine communities – people whose lives are closely connected to subsistence economy in the river – is investigated to add to the existing literature in Border Studies and Borderland Studies¹. Also, I consider border-crossings at *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* and take into account the everyday practices regarding spatial negotiations and temporal negotiations over the Mekong and the floating of meaning assigned to the river. The Thai-Lao border was drawn during the time of French influence in Indochina and passed on to the post-World War Two Lao administration. The Mekong has been used as a natural border since the 1893 Siam-French Treaty. However, this use of the river as a separating feature is at odds with many rivers in pre-colonial Southeast Asian states that act as unifying features forming the basis of the establishment of centres of settlement and transport (Scott, 2009). I argue that the Mekong is an integral part of the lives of the people on both banks. These lives are intertwined with the seasonal changes that greatly affect the water levels. From November to April, during the dry season, the level is low and many islands in the river appear. From May to September, the level increases dramatically and these islands disappear (Bureau of Research, Development and Hydrology, Department of Water Resource, Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment).

¹ The term *Thai Ban* refers not to the Thai nation-state but to the local people living on both sides of the Mekong. They rely significantly on subsistence economy and communication between villages regardless of different nation-states. The use of the term *Thai Ban* is not meant to suggest that their political subjectivities are fixed. Identities are contextual and strategically practised by political actors for their own benefit as discussed throughout this thesis.



Picture 1: Regional overview of Thailand and Lao PDR



Picture 2: Islands appear in the Mekong in the dry season. The picture is taken from *Khong Chiam* in Thai territory.²

This thesis is titled *Riverine Border Practices: People's Everyday Lives on the Thai-Lao Mekong Border*, and its research question asks *What are the ways in which unofficial modes of border-crossings by the Thai Ban along the Mekong Thai-Lao border are practised in their everyday lives and how can these unofficial modes of border-crossing be theorised as a contribution to existing Borderland Studies?* By discussing the research question, the concept of Third Space as proposed by Nail (2016) is developed with the example of pluralities of border-crossings in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*. Originally, the concept of Third Space was proposed by Bhabha (1991) and Soja (1996) and related to cultural hybridity and ideas in transition. However, Nail (2016) employed the term more specifically in relation to borderlands. My thesis develops the concept of the Third Space by weaving the spatial and temporal negotiations and political subjectivities of those who make border-crossings. The in-between nature of the movements of people who reject, subvert, and embrace the logic of national territory arises as they pursue their everyday activities. The description of in-between space was clarified as the area that cannot be identified as neither/nor, or both/and but it is a fuzzy zone as indicated by Prescott (1965). It means the territorial boundary cannot always be expected to entirely contain the flow of people. The research question investigates the ways in

² This picture is adapted from
<https://www.google.co.uk/maps/place/Khong+Chiam+District,+Ubon+Ratchathani,+Thailand>

which spatial and temporal practices and negotiations of political subjectivities are conducted by the local people on the Thai-Lao riverine border as a Third Space, especially through quasi-state checkpoints and areas where there are no checkpoints. The riverine border area of *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* is an appropriate area because the two local administrations have been granted authority by the Thai and Lao governments to regulate border-crossings. The uniqueness of this borderland as a Third Space is examined in tandem with seasonal dynamics, especially when the *thalweg* changes depending on the seasons³. Below, I outline the research design which leads to discussion of and response to the question of my doctoral project.

The section 1.2 indicates the empirical background of the focused area and the necessity of Borderland Studies research. I argue that while other Thai-Lao border checkpoints receive much attention from the Thai and Lao states, *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* with its quasi-state checkpoints and their casual border-crossing regulations is understudied, although cross-border activities are common⁴. I propose that the spatial and temporal negotiations, together with political subjectivities, are analysed as they contribute to the concept of the Third Space.

In section 1.4, I position my thesis by presenting the general debates in Border Studies and Borderland Studies in the twentieth century, beginning with the origin of Border Studies on the United States (US)-Mexico border and in other areas. This section draws on existing knowledge to explain the contribution of this thesis to the advancement of knowledge. The development of the conceptualisation of borders and the ways in which the casually regulated flow of people at quasi-state checkpoints and in areas where there are no checkpoints are understudied⁵. This focus on *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* helps overcome this deficit in the literature

³ According to International Law, *thalweg* is the line of greatest depth in a river used to separate two states. In the case of the Mekong, the greatest depth changes all the time because of the changes in the water level of the river.

⁴ See the work of Pongern (1998), Semyaem and Theeravit (2003), High (2009), and Paribatra (2013).

⁵ When there is no checkpoint in this area, mobile checkpoints may be launched anytime by state officers of the Thai and Lao states.

because the notion of Third Space – in-betweenness of space and temporality – is evident, especially when people interact with the practice of national territory.

Finally, the outline of the thesis is presented.

1.2 Locating the research

1.2.1 Empirical grounding/location

The Mekong River forms 1,108 kilometres of the 1,810 kilometres of the Thai-Lao border (Royal Thai Survey Department, Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters, 2016). The proposed area of the study is called *Ban Dan* which is located in *Khong Chiam* District in *Ubon Ratchathani* province (Thailand) and *Bane Maysingsamphane* in *Sanasomboun* which is located in *Champassak* (Lao PDR)⁶. This district in Thailand is the most eastern territory of the state and also marks the place at which the Mekong is replaced as the border by a land border of approximately 190 kilometres. Quasi-state checkpoints run by the local administrations of *Khong Chiam* and *Sanasomboun* are in operation.

During colonial days, the border was redrawn several times by the Thai state and French Indochina. The Siam-France Treaty in 1893 gave France control over the eastern banks of the river and this separated a significant number of Lao people who lived on the two banks (Winichakul, 1994)⁷. Article 1 in the 1893 Treaty stated that Thailand, then called Siam, ceded the eastern bank of the Mekong to France. Later, the western bank (see no. 5 in Picture 4 on page 13) was added to French Indochina in the early 1900s. This area was reclaimed by Thailand during World War Two with the support of the Japanese, but when Japan lost the war, the Thai state was forced to return the western bank, slightly east of the study's site, to France. *Champassak*, therefore, today occupies both banks of the Mekong.

⁶ *Ban Dan* is the name of the village. The local administration that has authority over *Ban Dan* is called *Ban Dan Khong Chiam*.

⁷ The assumption that the Thai state gave Lao territory to France is debatable as Ngaosyvathn and Ngaosyvathn (1994) argued that Lao territory was not given by the Thai state to France but was torn apart by the two empires.

During the Cold War, the Thai state was accused of supporting the US secret war in Laos (Wisaijorn, 2017). A number of US airbases were set up in the northeastern provinces such as at *Ubon Ratchathani* and *Udon Thani*, especially before 1975. After the withdrawal of the US forces and the establishment of the communist regime in Laos, this area in North-Eastern Thailand became a meeting point of the supposedly 'liberal democracy' under US influence, despite the continuation of the military regime in the Thai state. Paribatara (1984, p.30) even described Thailand as a "frontline state" that it would have to contain communism for other non-communist states in Southeast Asia. At the end of the Cold War, policies introduced by the two countries aimed at "changing battlefields into marketplaces" (Paribatra, 2013, p. 197) were launched and the area became important as an economic connection via a land border-crossing at *Chong Mek* between *Ubon Ratchathani* (Thailand) and *Champassak* (Lao PDR) (Kasetsiri, 1997). This land border-crossing is around twenty six point one kilometres from *Khong Chiam*. Formal trade between Thailand and Lao PDR involves hydro-electricity as Lao PDR is rich in water resources and waterfalls (Jerndall & Rigg, 1999), but an underground economy based on illegal activities also exists. Kasetsiri (1997) anticipated that this underground economy, in areas such as illegal logging, undocumented labourers, and prostitution, plays a significant role in boosting the post-Cold War economies of the two states. Because of the lack of formality at the quasi-state checkpoints, *Khong Chiam* and *Sanasomboun* are areas of in-betweenness where casually regulated border-crossings occur daily. Despite this, the practice of rigid territory that separates two national spaces does not disappear. On the other hand, pluralities of border-crossings occur because of the co-existence of the people's mobility and the existence of territory.

1.2.2 Problem statement

The Thai-Lao border at *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* is an example of a Third Space that contributes to borderland theory and has not yet been investigated, especially in regard to the negotiations of space, temporality, and political subjectivities. Thus, this riverine border has been selected as the focus of this study of *Thai Ban* spatial and temporal practices that operate across the Thai-Lao border. It is a unique area subject to pluralities of people's mobility through quasi-state checkpoints that support

the theoretical proposal of this thesis, arguing for recognition of people's everyday lives in the context of this in-between borderland and Third Space. Other scholars in geography, political science, sociology and anthropology focus on border-crossings at formal checkpoints and non-checkpoints in the upper Mekong region. Meanwhile, the area of *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* has not been investigated, despite its unique location at the end of the Thai-Lao riverine and beginning of the land border.

The end of the Cold War saw the triumph of economic liberalism in global politics and, as a result, the Mekong section of the Thai-Lao border was perceived by the elites of the two states not as a barrier but as an area of contact. Thailand has long been Lao PDR's major trader. During the Cold War when the Thai state banned the export of strategic goods, such as medicine and food, to the land-locked state, Lao PDR frequently had to rely on illegal traders along the border (Santasombat, 2008). In 1988, the first bridge between Thailand and Lao PDR (between *Nong Khai* and *Vientiane*) was agreed, and it was completed in 1994. Under the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) scheme, other constructions and/or improvements of roads and bridges were planned. The Lao government supported these improvements to basic infrastructure to aid the country's trade development, focussing on a less centralised state-controlled economic plan, compared to that favoured during the Cold War (Rigg, 2016). This period also saw the introduction of projects to facilitate contact between the liberal democratic Thai state and the socialist-communist Lao PDR. A development plan indicated the Lao government in 1994-95 aimed to reform the country from one based on a subsistence economy to one based on economics for deregulated markets with less government control policy than those of the past (Rigg, 2005). These infrastructure construction plans aimed to support foreign investment and the tourist industry in Lao PDR but at the same time facilitate the use of cheap Lao labour in Thailand. Meanwhile, quasi-state checkpoints run by local administrations were mentioned by the central governments of the Thai and Lao states (Pongern, 1998). A number of scholars have paid attention to these quasi-checkpoints, such as Walker (1999) who conducted anthropological research regarding the underground economy in *Chiang Khong* (Thailand)-*Houay Xay* (Lao

PDR) and Rungmanee (2014, 2016) who focused on the undocumented crossings in *Mukdahan* (Thailand)-*Savannakhet* (Lao PDR)⁸.

Santasombat (2008) said the underground economy played a significant role at *Chiang Khong-Houay Xay* (see no.4 in Picture 3 on page 12). The riverine communities in *Chiang Khong* had had cultural and trade relations with communities in *Houay Xay* since pre-colonial times (Sankhamanee, 2006). Even during the Cold War when the central administration in Bangkok imposed an economic blockade on Lao PDR, the underground economy still played a role in this area. *Khong Chiam*, the focus of this thesis (see no.5 in Picture 3 on page 12) has similar trans-border activities such as underground economy and undocumented labourers. However, tourists from Thailand to Lao PDR are expected to pass through the formal checkpoints at *Chong Mek-Phonethong* located around 30 kilometres away from *Khong Chiam*. The area focused on in this thesis is not considered as one generally used by tourists from Thailand to enter Lao PDR. Still, tourism has become a major source of income for Lao PDR since the end of the Cold War. Tourist figures for the period from 1990 to 1995 were 13 times higher than the 14,400 visitors in 1986 (Pongern, 1998). Three-quarters of the Thai tourists who visit Lao PDR are reported to be from border provinces and are permitted by the 1997 Agreements of Thai-Lao Border-Crossing of both states to stay a maximum of three days.

Cheap labour is a necessity for the Thai economy, especially after the economic crisis in 1997 when the Thai currency exchange rate to US dollars dropped considerably. The Thai Alien Working Act, B.E. 2551 (2008) stated that aliens from nation-states bordering the Thai state were allowed to work in Thai territory temporarily without visas to boost the economy. In 2004, the Thai government ratified a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Lao PDR to register illegal labourers. The number of Lao migrants in Thailand was 100,046 in 2012 (Rigg, 2016). After the 2014 coup in Thailand, the Declaration of the National Council for Peace and Order: 70/2557 was established to re-organise labourers from Burma, Lao PDR, and Cambodia who were seen as threats to the Thai state and whose

⁸ I visited this border checkpoint at *Chiang Khong – Houay Xay* in 2016 and found that it became a formal checkpoint already.

work permits had expired but remained in Thailand⁹. During the time of my fieldwork, the central government of the Thai state paid particular attention to prostitution and drugs from Lao PDR in Thai territory and arrests occurred frequently.

Formal checkpoints on the Thai-Lao border have received attention from academia. Kasetsiri (1997) predicted that the *Mukdahan-Savannakhet* bridge checkpoint (no. 2 in Picture 3 on page 12) would become the most important border-crossing between Thailand and Lao PDR due to its direct link to the major port of *Danang* in Vietnam, followed by the *Nong Khai-Vientiane* crossing (no. 1 in Picture 3 on page 11). Another bridge border-crossing exists between *Nakhon Panom* and *Khammouane* (no. 3 in Picture 3 on page 11).

1.3 Aims of the research

1.3.1 Research questions

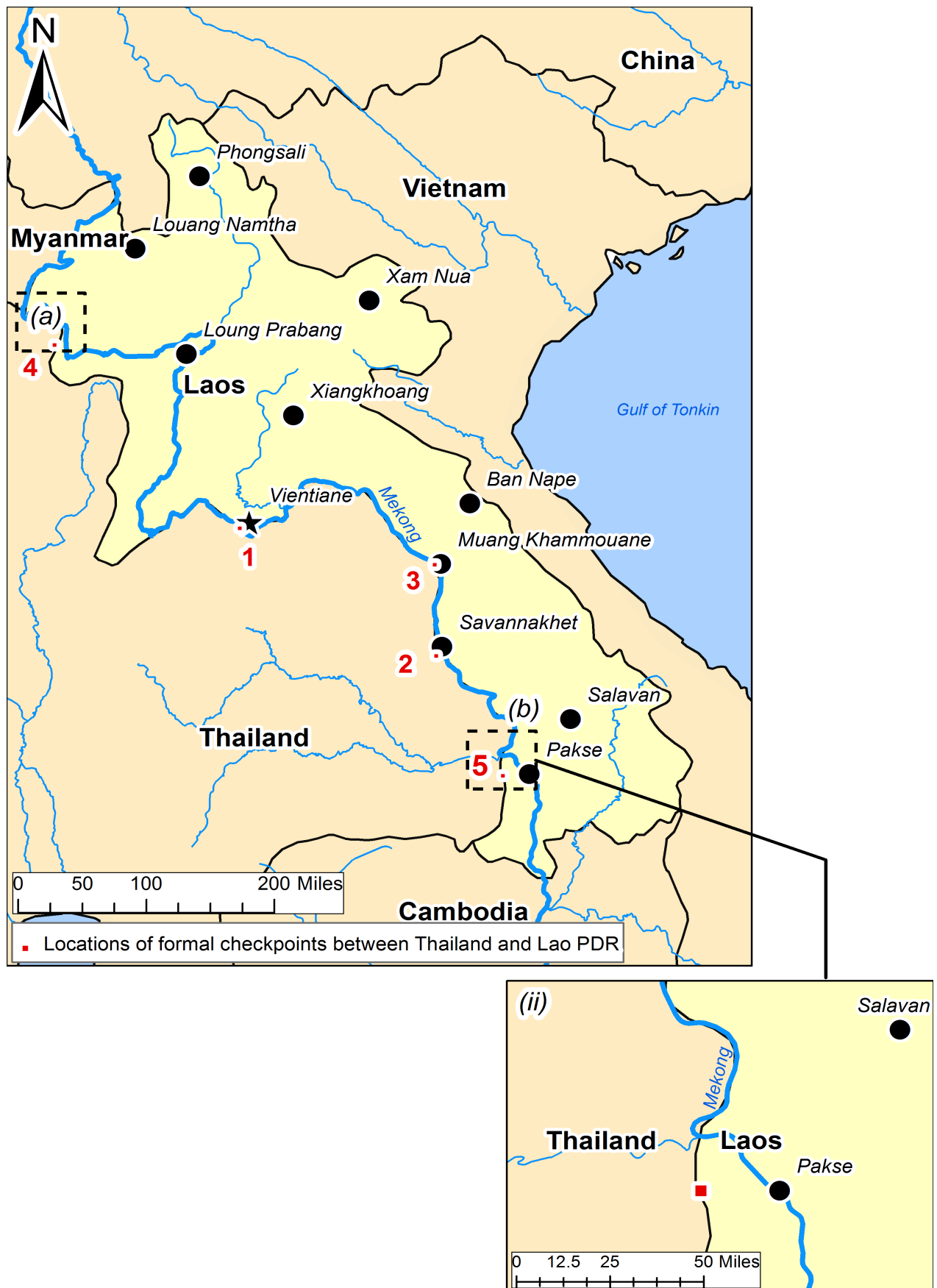
What are the ways in which unofficial modes of border-crossings by the Thai Ban along the Mekong Thai-Lao border are practised in their everyday lives and how can these unofficial modes of border-crossing be theorised as a contribution to existing Borderland Studies?

To focus on different aspects of space, temporality, and political subjectivities, the research question is divided into three sub-questions. The first sub-question asks *How do different actors in Khong Chiam and Sanasomboun spatially interpret and negotiate the Thai-Lao Mekong riverine border?* This question clarifies the fact that spatial negotiations take place every day and these negotiations shape the pluralities of the border-crossings which contribute to the nature of the Third Space. In this area spatial negotiations shape and are shaped by the existence of state territory. On some occasions, the *Thai Ban* who cross the border unofficially embrace the state-centric spatial interpretation of the border and at other times, they simply ignore the existence of the boundary and subvert it for their own ends. The second sub-question asks *What are the ways in which temporal pluralities are negotiated in the*

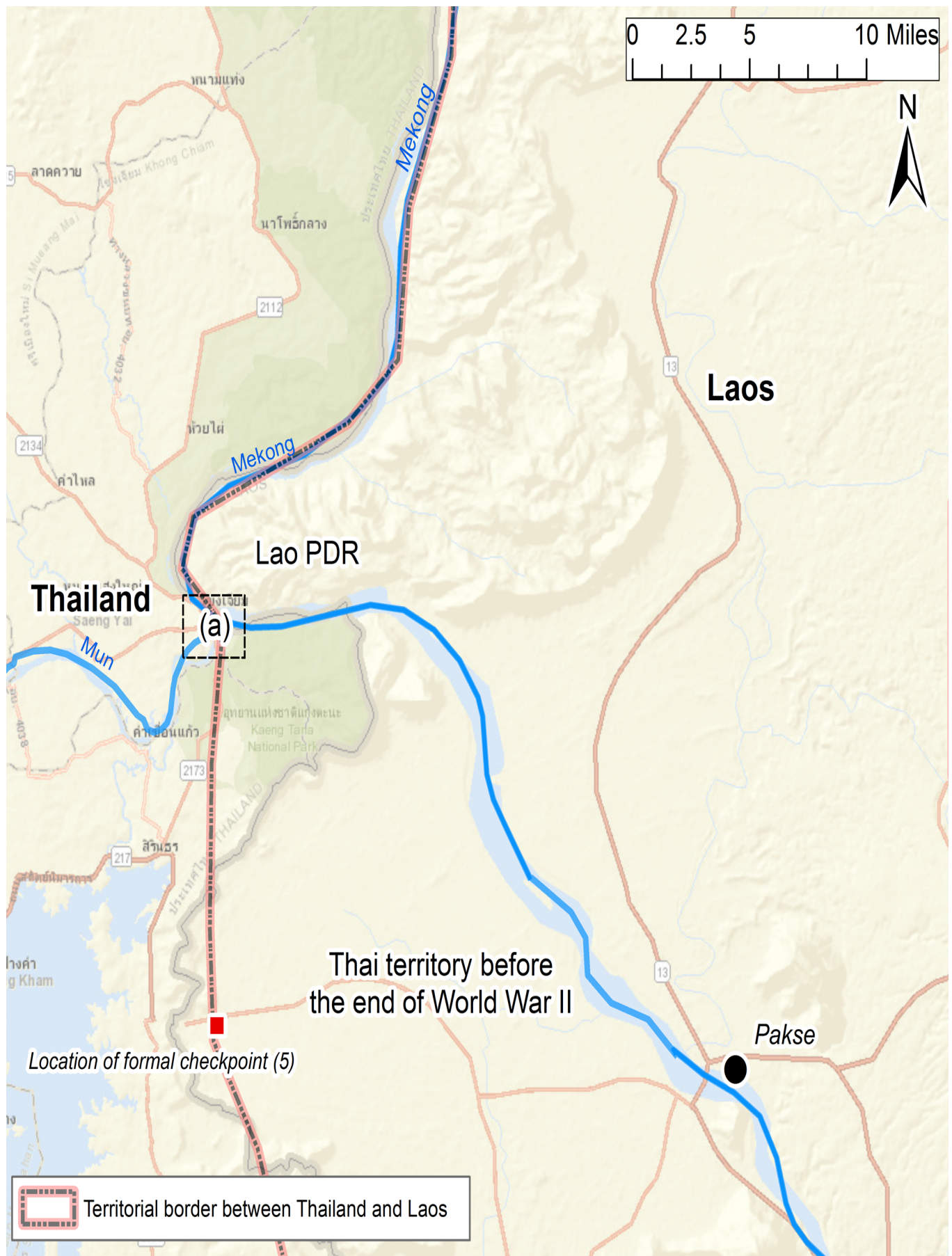
⁹ I use the term Burma instead of Myanmar to express disagreement with the Junta in Yangon who changed the country's name in early 1990s.

border-crossings on the riverine Thai-Lao border at Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun?

This sub-question clarifies the temporal dimension of the *Thai Ban*'s unofficial border-crossings.



Picture 2: Formal border checkpoints



Picture 4: Maps of the proposed area (1)

Sometimes the *Thai Ban* cross the border according to the timetable indicated by the local administrations, but those with their own boats cross at will. The third question asks *What are the ways in which the political subjectivities of the Thai Ban at the Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun border are negotiated and how do these ways contribute to the pluralities of everyday border-crossings?* This sub-question clarifies the in-betweenness of the Third space, especially the political subjectivities of the *Thai Ban* who make everyday border-crossings. Spatial and temporal negotiations contribute to the formulation of political subjectivities that take place when the *Thai Ban* embrace, subvert, and ignore the existence of the state boundary. The combination of spatial and temporal negotiations with political subjectivities contributes to Borderland Studies. Some literature has focused on the analysis of the pluralities in terms of space, temporality, and/or political subjectivities, but this thesis weaves the three together at the same time.

In this thesis, I aim to strengthen the conceptualisation of borders in two ways. The first aim is to analyse the everyday lives of the people from the centripetal perspective of the *Thai Ban* along this border. This perspective approaches people's mobility and their engagement with the border from their point of view, not that of the centre of the state. As discussed in Chapter 3, mainstream Border Studies tends to approach the border from the centre of the state, such as the capital city, resulting in the border being regarded as peripheral space rather than the focus. The *Thai Ban's* everyday mobility that cuts across the boundary and is not formally approved by the state is treated as exceptional and is not legal. This thesis argues that the centripetal approach shows the *Thai Ban's* everyday mobility to be banal and the pluralities of people's mobility co-exists with the existence of the Thai-Lao boundary. This analysis proposes that the notion of Third Space is crucial in shedding light on the pluralities of border-crossings in which people have various ways of engagement with the Mekong border. The second aim is to show that while mainstream social sciences in the region focus on formal checkpoints along the Thai-Lao border indicated in Picture 3 on page 12, I examine crossings at quasi-state checkpoints and in areas with no checkpoints as these reveal a better picture of plural border-crossings. These two modes of crossings are scattered throughout the 1,810

kilometres of the Thai-Lao border and should not be overlooked by academia or state policy practitioners. Accordingly, these two modes are the focus of this thesis.

1.4. General overview of the literature in Border Studies and Borderland Studies

This section is divided into three sub-sections. Firstly, it discusses the origins of Border Studies and Borderland Studies, arguing that in the early stages, natural landscape was used as simply state boundaries that separated national spaces. Coleman and Stuesse (2014) described this trend as topography. The second sub-section details the development of theory in which the journeys of people who cross borders to the hinterland of the host state become the focus as the people are constantly checked by the state officers there. This framework is described by Coleman and Stuesse (2014) as topology. The third sub-section discusses scholars who recognise that research on borders should not only focus on those who make long-distance journeys but also on people who live along borders. These three sub-sections outline the academic location of this thesis and provide the general background of Border Studies and Borderland Studies. This general background will further provide a springboard to the justification of the notion of the Third Space that is discussed more intensively and extensively in Chapter 2.

1.4.1 Origins of Border Studies and Borderland Studies

Scholars who studied borders in the first half of the twentieth century took the border as located at the physical edge of the state and this framework was described by Coleman and Stuesse (2014) as topography. The natural terrain of the border was regarded as a natural separator of different territorial states, and the meaning of the border was not paid much attention to. For example, the concept of natural borders was discussed in the work of Semple (1911) who argued that the best natural boundaries were areas where humans were unable to settle. Other political geographers described borders as parts of modern states and there was little critical thought about the effects of the reification of borders on the people of the areas

(Blake, 2000; Hartshorne, 1936; Prescott, 1965). By the end of the twentieth century, meanings of the border were brought into consideration, and nationalism was a major issue. Paasi (1996) argued that these lines very often were used to support state nationalism, as in the case of the Finnish-Soviet border during and after World War Two.

There have been similar instances of this geopolitical characteristic of nationalism in Thai-Lao border disputes over time. When Paribatra (1984), a Thai diplomat and scholar, restated the perception of Vietnam as a threat to Siam in pre-colonial days, the Thai-Lao border as a colonial legacy was resurrected. This was due to Vietnamese influence on the east bank of the Mekong, perceived to belong to Thailand but lost to France in 1893. Vietnamese influence in Laos was also noted after 1975. Paribatra's argument was based on nationalism but this was countered by a Lao diplomat and scholar, Ngaosyvathn (1985). In the analysis of Thai-Lao border conflicts in 1984, Ngaosyvathn (1985) said that claims to the disputed areas were unacceptable and the conflicts were a continuation of pan-Thaism that failed during World War Two. Paribatra (1984) used the border to arouse nationalistic feelings among Thais, and Ngaosyvathn (1985) did the same among Lao people. Accordingly, in relation to the Thai-Lao border, the meaning of the border was produced by nationalism rather than by the natural dynamics that affect the lives of the people who live there.

Winichakul (1994) studied the use of borders as a means to support nationalism. Maps of the Thai state and its 'lost' territory to France in the colonial days were presented in the mass media and school texts, encouraging a sense of belongingness in Thailand in his proposal of the term the geo-body of nation. Similar to Anderson's term of *imagined communities* (2006), Winichakul's arguments proposed that even citizens in a nation-state do not know each other, and feel they belong to the same nation by continuously consuming the printed production of the Thai state map. Winichakul saw the border as a social construct but did not sufficiently mention how the natural features of the river and mountains as boundaries played a part in the formulation of local people's everyday meanings that they put into practice.

1.4.2 People on the move over the border

In North America, a more people-centric approach was noted in Border Studies in the 1990s. Alvarez (1995) reviewed literature related to Border Studies that focused on the US-Mexican border. He recognised the long-distance activities of Mexicans who crossed the border in the work of Camara and Kemper (1979) and Weaver and Downing (1979). Anzaldúa (1987) said that borders not only exist at the edges of nation-states but in any locations where different identities meet. Apart from the border practices of the state, social borders were also raised in discussion in Border Studies. For example, Anzaldúa (1987) argued that these locations are where the border exists, implying that borders are not located in physical space but in the bodies of the migrants themselves. Those who make crossings interact with the physical border at the edge of the state but the border practices continue even when they move to the hinterland. Coleman and Stuesse (2014) described the fact that undocumented border-crossings continue to be policed inside the state as topology. Similar ideas are found among scholars in Border Studies in Europe. For example, Balibar (1998, p. 217) proposed the concept of “vacillation of borders,” arguing that borders are everywhere, especially in the post-Cold War era of faster and more widespread transport. Borders may be at airports and train stations in Europe. Vaughan-Williams (2009) stated that borders may be located beyond a country’s physical territory, such as the United Kingdom (UK) border checks in Brussels (Belgium) and Dunkirk (France). To cope with “mobile bodies” in the post-Cold War era, Vaughan-Williams (2009, p. 132) proposed the idea of a “biopolitical border” to International Relations in which borders are based on the bodies of the mobile people, regardless of their physical locations.

Biopolitical borders were noted on the Thai-Lao border, especially in the post-Cold War era. For example, Lao citizens who fled Lao PDR to Thailand and third countries have been studied by a number of Thai scholars. Chanthavanich and Pliansri (2011) and Leepreecha (2011) studied the case of displaced Hmong, former Lao citizens, whose movements cut across not only the Thai-Lao border but also that of the US. These peoples were stripped of their Lao citizenship during the Cold War as they helped the US fight the communist party that became the government of Lao PDR after 1975. Displaced Hmong in Thai territory still had contact with Hmong in the US

and were accused by the Lao government of plotting insurgency in the early 2000s. The research of Chanthavanich and Pliansri (2011) and Leepreecha (2011) represented another step in the theory of borders, their focus being on long-distance border-crossers. These examples in the literature that examine the people on the move reveal that the border is not necessarily located at the edge of the state. My thesis focuses clearly on the Thai-Lao people who put the meaning they assign to the Mekong river border into their everyday practice. As a result, the thesis uses a combination of topology and topography.

1.4.3 People's deep placement in the borderland

Border Studies and Borderland Studies are not only about people whose movements involve long distances but also about people who live on borders. The borders are the focus but different geographical landscapes play a role in local's everyday lives that affect their border-crossings. In this section, to illustrate this, I firstly discuss the border as a colonial legacy that affected the lives of the people in Bangladesh-India as studied by Jones (2010). Secondly, I show people's use of the existence of a river border (Flynn, 1997). The case study of Flynn (1997) is similar to border-crossings at *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*. In my research area, people's interaction with the Mekong as the boundary is highlighted as not only a line that separates people but also a bridge between them.

Firstly, Jones (2010) examined India-Bangladesh borders. The focus area is similar to the Thai-Lao border as colonial legacies that affect the lives of people who live there. However, this case of India-Bangladesh is odd in that it involves an Indian enclave located inside Bangladesh resulting from unsettled border issues during colonial days. Jones (2010) argued that Indian citizens face difficulties being cut off from the Indian government. In the 1980s and 1990s, thieves and terrorist groups used the enclave as their sanctuary and Indian citizens, too poor to be relocated to mainland India, had to rely on themselves to handle these intruders. Bangladesh was unable to help because the enclave was de jure Indian territory. The Thai-Lao border is not as extreme as the India-Bangladesh situation studied by Jones (2010). However, they are both colonial legacies that overlook the lives of the people's deep placement in the borderland and their movements that occur every day. Nowadays,

the India-Bangladesh enclave no longer exists as India and Bangladesh exchanged territory to overcome the problem (Jones, 2015, personal communication). As examined in this thesis, people in the Thai-Lao border were theoretically cut off by the boundary drawing in colonial days. However, this thesis shows that the feature that forms the border has become part of the people's everyday lives; the Mekong river acts as a space of life and as territory.

Secondly, the concept of deep placement together with natural landscape involved in border-crossings, similar to the Thai-Lao border at *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*, is found in the work of Flynn (1997). This study of borderland people was conducted in the *Shabe* region on the Beninois-Nigerian border, and is similar to the situation in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* in three aspects. Firstly, both borders resulted from colonialism in the late nineteenth century. The boundaries imposed by the colonial elites separated the kinship and trade ties at local levels, the *Yoruba* people on the Beninois-Nigerian border and the Lao people on the Thai-Lao border. Secondly, unequal levels of modernisation of territory on the two sides exist in both cases. Catholic missionaries in the 1970s built a number of secondary schools and health care services supported by the Dutch government in Benin, and this side of the *Okpara* River is considered to be more modern (Flynn, 1997). On the Thai-Lao border, the Thai territory is considered to be more modern than the Lao side because of different political systems during the Cold War. Thirdly, seasonal dynamics, as well as natural landscape, play a crucial role in cross-border activities on the *Okpara*. Natural difficulties in wet seasons impede travellers by truck and on foot, and long-distance traders need local communities' assistance to pass through their area using canoes.

1.5. Structure of the thesis

This thesis is presented in eight chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction.

The second chapter discusses literature that examines locals' spatial and temporal negotiations, their different political subjectivities, and the pluralities of border-crossings. The focus of research in Border Studies and Borderland Studies has

varied and the concepts of space, temporality, and negotiations of political subjectivities have not been simultaneously involved in the analyses of borders. This chapter initially traces the development of Border Studies in the mid-twentieth century which identified borders from the centres of states and regarded them as separators of two states. This approach was defined by Coleman and Stuesse (2014) as topography. The chapter then introduces the second theme that involves scholars' arguments that borders not only occur at the edges of states but may be located at places where contact is made with different groups of people. This approach is defined as topology. The chapter then introduces the third theme that discusses the theoretical approach of Borderland Studies which proposes a mixture of topology and topography. Afterwards, this chapter provides a focus on borderland areas and borders as third spaces separating two states. This is an in-between space in which clear-cut social divisions are difficult to achieve. Finally, the chapter proposes to outline the contribution of this thesis to the advancement of knowledge about borders and border-crossings. It discusses literature that focuses on negotiations of political subjectivities and temporal and spatial negotiations involved in peoples' movements across borders.

The third chapter involves methodology presented in four steps. The first is related to the assumption that the world is sedentary. Second, the centripetal approach taken in this thesis is described in detail. On the basis of these two steps, I then discuss the understanding of the everyday practices of Lefebvre (1971, 2000, 2002) and outline the specific understanding of political subjectivity used in this thesis. Lastly, the methodology section discusses the appropriateness of ethnography, especially participant observations, to answer the research question and to understand the different modes of border-crossings from the participants' perspectives. Other methods used to complement participant observations were the reading of participants' essays, interpreting their visual presentations, and interviews.

In Chapter 4, fieldwork findings show that a state-centric territorial interpretation of the Mekong is not the only interpretation. This chapter states that spatial negotiations in the area are endlessly negotiated in the everyday mobility of the people where quasi-state checkpoints are in operation. Drawing on the doctoral thesis of Rungmanee (2014), quasi-state checkpoints are the areas where the local

administrations at the district level in both states are granted their own authority to indicate where and when the informal border-crossings should be made. Pongern (1998) described this type of checkpoint as a cultural checkpoint or '*dan watthanatham*', in which no legal formality is required for crossing. No official details of the border-crossers are recorded. These quasi-state checkpoints are different from the formal checkpoints in other areas where customs and police officers are expected to permanently be working. The prefix 'quasi' suggests the fact that the central governments – Bangkok and Vientiane -- do not directly exercise their authority at such checkpoints although their authority is not totally absent. In my fieldwork, the local administrations of *Ban Dan Khong Chiam* and *Bane Maysingsamphane* have been granted authority to run border-crossings which are casually conformed to. People's interpretations of the river are not limited to it as territory and a lived space as a source of food and a means of transport. Other meanings exist, such as the Mekong as a space of spiritual significance as the residence of the Naga, and this belief affects decisions to cross the border.

In Chapter 5, I examine the temporal negotiations that take place in the borderland. Two temporal concepts are defined; *chronos* refers to time controlled by the state and *kairos* is the actual practices of temporal interpretation that may or may not conform to state timetables. In the area where quasi-state checkpoints exist, people have to make judgements regarding crossing the border. Accordingly, the kairotic moment of time shapes and is shaped by *chronos* endlessly. The relationship between *chronos* and *kairos* is crucial to highlight the in-betweenness of the pluralities of temporal analysis and border-crossings in this borderland.

The sixth chapter shows that political subjectivities change depending on spatial and temporal negotiations, relationships with other people, and their positionalities at the times of the encounters in the locals' everyday practices. The contextual political subjectivities contribute to the pluralities of the border-crossings as the *Thai Ban* have various interpretations and practices in regard to the Mekong as the Thai-Lao border. As found in Chapter 4, the meaning of the Mekong floats between being territory to divide two national spaces, a lived space, and other possible meanings. People's political subjectivities and the floating of meaning assigned to the river in terms of space and time are interdependent.

The seventh chapter discusses theoretical reflection of the Third Space that I aim to contribute to Borderland Studies. In this chapter, I discuss the shedding of light on the nature of Third Space by the weaving of the analyses of spatial negotiations, temporal negotiations, and political subjectivities. The three concepts are interrelated in that when one moves from one space to another, time is involved. In addition, when a border-crossing is made, especially at a quasi-state checkpoint or a location with no checkpoint, people's judgements play a crucial role in when and where to cross the border. Especially, the *Thai Ban* in the focused area must ensure that their trip over the border is not stopped by the state officers of Thailand and Lao PDR in their everyday practices and engagement with the Mekong. Therefore, the negotiations of political subjectivities come into consideration with spatial and temporal negotiations. This chapter also argues that the mixture of topology and topography helps highlight the co-existence of the sedentary assumption in the form of territory and people's mobility. This mixture may be applied in the analysis of the pluralities of border-crossings in other parts of the world. Also, this chapter states how the empirical findings of this thesis contribute to the theoretical framework employed in this thesis that are from western contexts. It argues that the analysis of everyday practices by Lefebvre (2002), with his four semantic elements of sign, symbol, signal, and image, helps better explain the pluralities of border-crossings and is more appropriate for situations at quasi-state checkpoints than the concept of biopolitics and disciplinary power of Foucault (1998, 2009). The analyses of the four elements, moreover, help support the use of the weaving of the analyses of spatial and temporal negotiations and negotiations of political subjectivities in the Third Space.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by discussing the contribution of the weaving of space, temporality, and political subjectivities in the analysis of the borderland and plans for possible future research.

Chapter 2 - Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature that examines the pluralities of locals' border-crossings, and that that is specifically relevant to these people's spatial and temporal negotiations and their different political subjectivities. Research in Border Studies and Borderland Studies has focused on the pluralities of people's political subjectivities and their spatial and temporal engagements with borders, but its focus has varied and the concepts of space, temporality, and political subjectivities have not been simultaneously involved in the analyses of borders. Border Studies generally refers to traditional schools which consider borders using a state-centric paradigm and regard them as peripheral spaces. Borderland Studies, on the other hand, adopts a more border-centric perspective. The work of Jones and Johnson (2014) on borderlands was less state-centric but they defined themselves as scholars in Border Studies.¹⁰

This thesis aims to add to existing literature by the examination of the spatial and temporal negotiations of borders by local people with different political subjectivities. It takes the pluralities of border-crossings into theoretical account as they are realities that happen every day. Inspired by Lefebvre (1971, 2000, 2002), the thesis aims to highlight the unique features of the daily crossings of borders by local people. To achieve this aim, this chapter initially presents a broad overview of Border Studies and Borderland Studies via three themes. The first theme traces the development of Border Studies in the mid-twentieth century which identified borders from the centres of states and regarded them as separators of two states' spaces. This approach was defined by Coleman and Stuesse (2014) as topography. The chapter then introduces the second theme that involves scholars' arguments that borders not only occur at the edges of states but may be located at places where

¹⁰ Vaughan-Williams and Parker (2014, p. 2) proposed a set of informal meetings on border theories. The group was called Critical Border Studies (CBS) which refers to the scholarship that is critical of traditional border conceptualisation. This indicates a lack of a clear-cut separation of the scholars in Border Studies and Borderland Studies. Nevertheless, this thesis employs the term Borderland Studies as referring to the analysis of the border that takes the borderland as the focus of the study.

contact is made with different groups of people. This approach was defined as topology (Coleman & Stuesse, 2014). The chapter then introduces the third theme that discusses the theoretical approach of Borderland Studies which proposes a mixture of topology and topography. Secondly, this chapter provides a focus on borderland areas and borders as a Third Space separating and bridging two states' spaces at the same time. Drawing on Nail (2016), it argues that when two spaces are divided, the divide forms a space of its own, a Third Space. This Third Space is an in-between space in which clear-cut social divisions are difficult to achieve. Thirdly, this chapter proposes to outline the contribution of this thesis to the advancement of knowledge about borders and border-crossings. It discusses literature that focuses on political subjectivities and temporal and spatial negotiations involved in peoples' movements across borders. It also examines the nature of Third Space as borderland people make their everyday movements over these borders. These negotiations of spatial, temporal, and political subjectivities are woven together to highlight the pluralities of borderland people as they reject, subvert, and reconfirm the existence of borders, depending on the context. Some literature has touched on spatial negotiations, temporal dimensions, and political subjectivities. However, no research has woven the three themes together to highlight the pluralities of border-crossings.

2.2 Border Studies and Borderland Studies

Traditional Border Studies focuses on borders at the physical edges of states (topography). However, another group of scholars argues that borders are no longer at these edges but also occur where contact with people with different political subjectivities is made (topology) (Coleman & Stuesse, 2014)¹¹. Paasi and Newman (1998) proposed a framework that combines topography and topology to simultaneously analyse people's flow and the physical edges of states. This mixture of topography and topology is adopted by this approach and proposes that the border of two national spaces does not simply separate but also bridges them. This

¹¹ The use of the term topology by Mezzadra and Neilson (2012) differs from what is meant by Coleman and Stuesse (2014). The use by Mezzadra and Neilson (2012) refers to traditional border cartography or *fabrica mundi* as discussed in chapter 3. This thesis retains the use by Coleman and Stuesse (2014),

divide forms a space of its own that becomes the Third Space and pluralities of spatial, temporal, and political subjectivities occur daily.

2.2.1 Topography

Traditional Border Studies in the first half of the twentieth century focused on borders at the physical edges of states. The concept of natural borders was often played down as they were conceptualised simply as parts of the state, as discussed by Semple (1911) who argued that the best natural boundaries were areas where humans were unable to settle. Other state-centric political geographers described borders as part of Westphalian states and there was little critical thought about the effects of their reification on the people of the areas (Blake, 2000; Hartshorne, 1936; Prescott, 1965). The Westphalian attitude that people and space were separated was practised in Europe and exported to the rest of the world by colonisation (Soja, 1989). Ruggie (1998) explained the spatial practice shift from feudalism to modern states in Europe in the seventeenth century as territory became fixed. After the Thirty Years War and the acceptance of the Treaty of Westphalia, the principle of "*cuius regio eius religio*" (the religion of the ruler dictates the religion of the ruled) and "*rex in regno suo est imperator regni sui*" (the king is the emperor of his own realm) became the norm in Western Europe (Ruggie, 1998, p. 184). Modern political space thus became "distinct, disjoint, and mutually exclusive territorial formation" (Ruggie, 1998, p. 172), and more rigid territorial borders were practised among sovereign states. In International Relations, Herz asserted that state territorial borders were "hard-shell" (1959, p. 40), and Sack (1983, p. 59) regarded them as technology to control space and people. This view is similar to the border assumption among geographers. For example, Prescott (1987, p. 5) referred to borders as "the line of physical contact between states." Up to the present day, Grundy-Warr and Schofield (2005) argued that this state-centric definition of borders still remains influential.

The assumption that state space is separated still continues despite an increasingly globalised world in which cross-border interactions have become more common, leading to claims of a borderless world (Ohmae, 1996). However, a number of areas are becoming increasingly bordered, such as tighter restrictions between Mexico and the US and the European Union (EU) and non-EU countries. Topographic definitions

are still reproduced in Border Studies and Borderland Studies and most states still “redraw the lines separating them from their neighbours” (Grundy-Warr & Schofield, 2005, p. 656). For example, topography is present in the analysis by Henrikson (2011) of local co-operation regarding three levels of border management. Firstly, border co-operation is conducted at a state-to-state level, such as negotiations between the former US President, Ronald Reagan, and Mexican Prime Minister, Felipe Calderon, in the 1980s. The second level is ministry-to-ministry, as shown in 1976 when the Consultative Mechanism was established by the former US President, Jimmy Carter, and the Mexican President, Lopez Portillo. Thirdly, at the local level, the US Border Regional Commission and Mexican institution held a Co-ordinating Commission of the National Programme for the Border and Free Zones in 1979. In the spatial conceptualisation of Henrikson (2011, p. 90), the idea of a good fence makes good neighbours is influential, and territorial borders still exist.

Because of the number of people crossing the US-Mexican border, Ackleson (1999, p. 161) regarded the state as a “leaking container.” Ackleson was aware that people at borders attempt to cross them regularly and it is impossible to control the movements at all places at all times. From a state-centric position, the assumption of a self-contained state played a significant role in this author’s discussions. Security played an important role on the US-Mexican border pre- and post-9/11 in the detection of “transnational threats” (Ackleson, 2005, p. 165), and after 9/11, undocumented migrants were seen as “disorder” and “chaos” when compared with the orderly situation inside US territory (Ackleson, 2005, p. 165). The topographical approach was also influential in the work of Williams (2011) relating to the US-Mexican border. After 9/11, security on this border increased, and Allison stated that the task of securing the border moved from a civilian focus to a military one with the use of Unmanned Aviation Vehicles (UAV). Nicol (2011, p. 267) stated that the US regarded terrorists, criminals, and illegal immigrants as potential threats, and added that the US even requested that the Canadian government conform to the policy of Washington in relation to the granting of visas to Mexican labourers.

Topography is moreover evident in discussions about border issues in the Mekong River basin. The doctoral dissertation in International Relations of Paribatra (2013) focused on Thailand’s borders and the attitudes of the national government to them

as peripheral. Paribatra regarded the Thai-Lao border conflicts in 1984 and 1987 as results of an un-demarcated border that led to “the threat perception” (p. 288), and the 1996 border survey as an attempt in the prevention of further conflicts and “managing uncertainties” (p. 305). In a research report funded by the Institute of Asian Studies, Pongern (1998) completed an analysis of border trade between Thailand and Lao PDR. The report stated that from 1988 to 1987 there were three permanent checkpoints along the 1835 kilometres of the Thai-Lao border.¹² Local border checkpoints defined by Pongern (1998, p. 50) as “cultural checkpoints” (*dan watthanatham*) were justified as the policy makers of the Thai and Lao states were aware that the centres of the states are unable to control all the people’s movements all the time, especially the movements of those with kinship ties across the border. Pongern (1998) identified four plans to improve Thai-Lao relations after the conflicts of the Cold War and following the then Thai Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan’s famous quote of ‘*turning the battlefields into the market places.*’ These plans involved the promotion of cross-border trade, the resumption of the transportation of certain banned items to Lao PDR during the Cold War, the granting of permission to provincial governments to handle border-crossings in their provinces, and the encouragement of private sector entrepreneurs to run businesses in Lao PDR.

2.2.2 Topology

Topology can be noted in studies of people crossing the Thai-Lao border, especially in the post-Cold War era, despite the term not being explicitly referred to. Chanthavanich and Pliansri (2011) and Leepreecha (2011) studied cases of displaced Hmong, former Lao citizens, whose movements cut across not only the Thai-Lao border but also that of the US. These people were stripped of their Lao citizenship during the Cold War as they helped the US fight the communists who formed the government of Lao PDR after 1975. Displaced Hmong in Thai territory still had contact with Hmong in the US and were accused by the Lao government of plotting insurgency in the early 2000s. These studies represented another step in the theory of borders, their focus being on long-distance border-crossers. This thesis believes that the analyses by these researchers are trapped by their state-centric

¹² Paribatra (2013) said the length is 1810 kilometres. This information is still debatable.

approach. The movements of the Hmong were described by Chanthavanich and Pliansri (2011) as deviant or problematic for the Thai state, probably due to the position of Pliansri as Secretary of the National Security Council (NSC) at that time. People have different modes of crossing borders and are not necessarily deviant and/or exceptional as determined by state-centric anthropology.

A topological approach exists in the work of scholars who regard borders as not necessarily only occurring at the edges of states. Anzaldúa (1987) said that bordering practices exist among different identities in describing Mexican labourers in the US. It must be noted that the border practices among different social groups and identities are not the same as the border concept used to describe physical borders at the edges of states, though they are interrelated. For example, some Mexican immigrants in the US faced racial prejudice and exploitation, and developed a consciousness of being non-Americans to deal with these difficult situations. Anzaldúa (1987) stated that these situations are where the border exists, implying that the border is not a physical space but occurs in encounters with racialised subjects. This example of a social border raised by Anzaldúa occurs on the one hand. On the other hand, the border practices of the state in the hinterland are practised by US officers as they continue to arrest and deport undocumented Mexican migrants (Coleman & Stuesse, 2014).

Similar ideas are found among scholars in Border Studies and Borderland Studies and International Relations in Europe. Balibar (1998, p. 217) proposed the concept of “vacillation of borders,” arguing that borders may be at airports and train and bus stations, especially in the post-Cold War era in which transport has become faster and more common. Parker and Vaughan-Williams (2014, p. 2) said that borders do not have to be located at the physical edges of states but they have to be “performed” by putting the bordering idea into practice – it does not matter where the practice takes place. For example, Parker and Vaughan-Williams (2014) explained that borders may occur in the space where the passport-check is performed and when one is approved to enter the host state. This approval takes place at the airport and hence is in line with the proposal of Balibar (1998). Vaughan-Williams (2009) pointed out that borders may even be located beyond a nation-state’s physical territory, such as the UK border checks in Brussels and Dunkirk. To cope with

“mobile bodies” in the post-Cold War era, Vaughan-Williams (2009, p. 132) proposed the idea of a “biopolitical border” in which borders are based on the mobile people, regardless of their physical locations.

Mezzadra and Neilson (2012, p. 60) argued that to assume that borders are fixed lines separating states is insufficient because of the number of irregular migrants who cross borders illegally in Europe. It must be noted that Mezzadra and Neilson’s use of the term topology differs from its meaning in this thesis. For Mezzadra and Neilson (2012), topology refers to the drawing of traditional borders that divide different national-states. They regard this “topological approach” as insufficient (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2012, p. 63) because borders not only separate states but also bridge them. Mezzadra and Neilson (2012) therefore called for another approach as there are undocumented labourers who work in the hinterlands of host states and do not have the feeling of belongingness in the area in which they work. One theoretical proposal used to explain this is the drawing of a map to replace the traditional topological approach. For example, an “interactive map” developed by the International centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) was introduced to assess the unpredictability of the flows of people (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2012, p. 71). To understand the unpredictable pluralities of border-crossings, as demanded by Mezzadra and Neilson (2012), a mixture of topography and topology in borderland areas is proposed as a methodological standpoint of this thesis.

2.2.3 Borderland Studies and the mixture of topography and topology

The mixture of topography and topology is a useful framework for most scholars in Borderland Studies. It is appropriate to the topic of this thesis that aims to shed light on the pluralities of people’s interactions with borders in terms of space, temporality, and political subjectivities. Topography in this thesis refers to the study of the traditional and physical edges of states and topology refers to people’s practices regarding borders. The mixture of the two terms therefore focuses on people’s mobility that occurs in borderland areas. Coleman and Stuesse (2014, p. 37) said that when topography is applied, the analysis focuses on “geopolitics,” the politics of space. However, the application of topology considers “biopolitics,” the management of people who cross borders. The control of space and people’s mobility then can be

taken into the analysis at the same time. Coleman and Stuesse (2014) argued that topography and topology are constitutive frameworks as they were used in the US government's policing of undocumented labourers who crossed the border under the scheme of the Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1986 (IRCA) to work in the US. To focus on people's movements in borderland areas from the position of the state as the centre fails to consider the pluralities of border-crossings in terms of spatial, temporal, and political subjectivity negotiations. This thesis is in agreement with the literature that employs both topology and topography with the focus on borderlands to examine the ways in which people who cross borders reject, subvert, and embrace them, depending on the context.

Goodhand (1999, 2005, 2008) proposed that borders and their adjacent areas be taken as the points of analysis, and implied that borders are "entities in their own rights" (2008, p. 226). They should not only be viewed as spaces to be crossed. When the boundary in a borderland is analysed in tandem with the people who make crossings every day, the mixture of topology and topography is very useful. Accordingly, Goodhand introduced the concept of 'centripetal' (see chapter 3) that describes the process of approaching borderland areas from their perspectives and not from the viewpoints of the centres of states. Goodhand (2005) used the centripetal approach and raised the example of border politics in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime before the US invasion in 2001 to explain the borderland shaping the centre of the state. When the Taliban government first came into power, they allowed local warlords along the border to grow poppies and sell drugs freely. All of the sudden, in 2000, the Taliban announced the growing of drugs was not in line with Islam and indicated that the poppy trade was illegal. This caused frustration among borderland warlords who later joined US forces in the War on Terror in 2001 against the Taliban (Goodhand, 2005).

The borderland focus is advanced by the notion of the examination of people's deep placement in borderlands as spaces by Megoran (2010) on of the Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan boundary reified in Stalin's time. This was at odds with local people as they intermingled in the mountainous area of the Ferghana Valleys in Central Asia and enclaves of both nationalities existed in both countries. The feeling of separation at this border was not felt until 1993 when the then Uzbek President Karimov

announced the closure of the Uzbek border to restrict the flow of Russian currency. Before the announcement of the closure, people crossed the border freely, even though there were checkpoints. At the closure, a number of bridges that crossed the border were demolished, visas were required, and checkpoints became stricter. Uzbek villagers did not agree with these developments, feeling that their normal activities were interrupted. In this area, the mountainous landscape significantly shaped the peoples' spatial practices, and even when the boundary was strictly controlled, locals exploited the mountainous landscape to cross the border without state approval and participated in smuggling activities. The research of this area is similar to the Thai-Lao border, the focus of this thesis, not only because Megoran (2010) took the natural terrain of the borderland – the mountainous zone – into the consideration of people's everyday mobility but also analysed the lives of the people who actually live there. This analysis involved a combination of topographical and topological frameworks.

2.3 Third Space: A concept in Borderland Studies

This thesis adopts the approach of Goodhand (2008) to borderland areas as single units and in the way in which they shape the centres of states. Goodhand (2005, 2008) not only emphasised the line that divides two state spaces but also the dynamics of the way the two spaces separated by the boundary shape each other. The notion of the Third Space has been developed in sociology, cultural studies, and geography. In Border Studies and Borderland Studies, the Third Space has been conceptualised by a number of scholars but it is further developed by this thesis.

I provide an outline of the foundation of the notion of the Third Space as applied in Borderland Studies. The concept of "Third Space" was coined by Bhabha (1991, p. 130) to indicate the in-between nature of two different cultures in which there is no clear-cut separation. Soja (1996, p. 3) added that it is a form of social spatiality with "a shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances and meanings." Drawing on the *Production of Space* of Lefebvre (1991), Soja (1996, p. 6) regarded the first space as a material condition of space and the second space as how space is imagined. The Third Space of Soja (1996) is therefore a shifting of ideas and

practice between the material and imagination. Similarly, Bhabha's notion of "Third Space" was not literally about the contiguous zone of two state spaces (1991, p. 130). First, Bhabha's Third Space refers to the production of the meaning of the environment outside by human interpretation. There is no such reality 'out there' that waits for humans to interpret it but human interpretation shapes and is shaped by the surrounding environment. Such an interpretation thus is called the Third Space (with capital letters). Second, the Third Space of Bhabha refers to how two cultures shape and are shaped by each other. Hence there is no neat delineation of two different cultures. This second interpretation is similar to the application in this thesis that interprets the border as an in-between zone where two contiguous territorial states shape each other and form a single unit as a borderland area.

When borderland people cross the border, they sometimes conform to state border logic if it benefits them, and on other occasions, they do not. Such practices occur where two states meet and create a unique space (Nail, 2016). Van Houtum and Struver (2002, p. 145) explained that the people in borderland areas find ways in their everyday practices to "contribute to their own habitus." In the early stage of the examination of the border in geography, this feature of borders was theoretically recognised by Prescott (1987, p. 9) who drew on the classical geopolitician Ratzel and stated that borders are areas where states both allow "exchanges to occur" and provide "protection" of their own resources. Prescott (1987, p. 13) described these areas as "a transitional zone" in which the distinction between two supposedly separated spaces was blurred. Prescott's approach may be advanced further as Alvarez (1995) conducted research in the borderland areas of US-Mexico. Alvarez (1995) criticised traditional state-centric topography in Border Studies as it considers culture and community as bounded within state territory and overlooks borderland people's interactions. Alvarez (1995) recommended that borders be rethought along the lines of US-Mexican communities that blend the identities of borderland people. Then, the notion of identity came to be highlighted as the idea of two identities completely separated was criticised – in this case Mexican and US identities. Other common features of people who live in areas where boundaries are drawn have also been studied. For example, Donnan and Wilson (1999) pointed out to a common identity of borderland people in terms of sport. In the twin border cities of Laredo, Texas and Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, there is only one baseball team and informal

cross-border are allowed for involvement of the club in the minor leagues of both Mexico and US. This study showed that the Third Space did not separate the Mexicans on one side and the Americans on the other. Indeed, the borderland was practised as a single unit.

Borderland Studies scholars did not directly use the term the Third Space as employed by Bhabha (1991), Lefebvre (1991), and Soja (1996). However, I can detect some similarities in terms of the in-between state of ideas and events in transition. When the term Third Space is used to describe borderland mobility, the in-between state is expressed in relation to the ambiguous meaning of space that is the everyday practice of the people in the area. For example, Nail (2016) said that territorial lines drawn by two states create third spaces and identified four characteristics of these third spaces. Firstly, borders are in-between spaces in which there are no clear political subjectivities of the borderland people. People, such as undocumented workers, may not be allowed to proceed within these spaces and may be redirected, a feature that Nail called extensive. Nail used the term intensive to relate to people who are allowed to proceed, such as tourists. These two features, extensive and intensive, are part of borders as in-between spaces. The second characteristic is that borders move. According to Vaughan-Williams (2009, p. 1), borders are not “in any sense given but (re)produced through modes of affirmation and contestation and is, above all, lived.” These movements may be due to events such as seas changing coastlines, rivers altering direction due to heavy rain and/or drought, and humans re-drawing borders. The third characteristic is the changes in the flow of people. This involves the management of people, a difficult issue, as some are allowed to enter, some are refused entry, and some try again and again. In these ways, these third spaces become transitional zones. As a result of such complexities, Nail (2016) asserted that borders cannot be only explained from a spatial perspective. Fourth, the analysis of borderlands should not be limited to space only. Axelson (2013, p. 324) said that “there is a tendency to privilege space and spatialities in geographical analysis of borders,” but other dimensions at borders, such as temporality and political subjectivities, need to be included in Border Studies and Borderland Studies. Mezzadra and Neilson (2013, p. 132) were in favour of consideration of the political subjectivities of people who cross borders, arguing that

space and temporality shape the political subjectivities of the “detained migrants, asylum seekers, banlieursards, international students, and IT workers” who are stopped at checkpoints when they go abroad. These political subjectivities form part of the nature of the third spaces.

The term the Third Space was developed and continued to be supported by concrete examples in the borderlands, such as by Abraham and Van Schendel (2005). These researchers offered a concrete example by stating that it is difficult to distinguish the legality or otherwise of the everyday practices of borderland people. They proposed that the notion of licitness/illicitness be taken into consideration as the law is not clear in regard to borderland people’s everyday lives. Legality is established by what the centres of states regard as legitimate, while licitness is what borderland people see as legitimate. Sometimes, legality and licitness are not the same. For example, Rungmanee (2014, 2016) stated that undocumented Lao labourers are hired to farm in Thai territory in *Mukdahan*. The labourers are illegal but licit according to the borderland villagers. The local Thai police disregard their illegality because they expect the labourers’ co-operation in the surveillance of trans-border drug trafficking in the area in return. The analyses of blurred legality and illegality by Abraham and Van Schendel (2005) and Rungmanee (2014, 2016) may be advanced further. This blurring is not only limited to the spatial movements of people. Rungmanee (2014, 2016) said that undocumented labourers resort to the use of quasi-state checkpoints to work in Thai territory and some even go to Bangkok, even though they are not allowed to do so. However, a temporal dimension may be added to this analysis of blurred legality by connecting the temporal flow and discontinuity that shape and are shaped by people’s political subjectivities and spatial negotiations. I aim to advance the knowledge of Borderland Studies by addressing this temporal dimension in relation to the spatial negotiations and political subjectivities of people who make border-crossings.

2.4 Pluralities of borderland people’s border-crossings: Negotiations of space, temporality, and political subjectivities

This section proposes that the weaving of spatial and temporal negotiations and the negotiations of political subjectivities shed light on the pluralities of people who make border-crossings as part of their everyday lives. It therefore reviews literature regarding borderland people's multiple ways of negotiating border-crossings. It further discusses how existing literature in Border Studies and Borderland Studies analyses the spatial and temporal negotiations and how political subjectivities play a role in border-crossings. Some literature has touched on spatial negotiations, temporal dimensions, and political subjectivities. However, no research has woven the three themes together to highlight the pluralities of border-crossings. The outline of this section is as follows. First, it offers an analysis of the overview of the literature in Border Studies and Borderland Studies of scholars' views of spatial negotiations. Second, it presents an analysis of the theoretical account of temporal features. Third, it examines the notion of political subjectivities in the literature of Border Studies and Borderland Studies.

2.4.1 Spatial negotiations

Literature in Border Studies and Borderland Studies that discusses people's negotiations in terms of space can be categorised into three groups. One group focuses on people who conform to accepted ways of crossing state borders and the states' management of these crossings. Another group considers people who conform and do not conform to accepted ways, depending on the context. The third group regards borders as fluid and some even argue that local people's movements are rarely constrained by the existence of national borders.

Firstly, there is a group of scholars that considers how border-crossings conform to state regulations. In many cases, the state's exercise of its sovereign power over space and people who cross over the line defined as territorial state is studied. Salter (2008, p. 366) stated that people are "administered" and disciplined at formal border checkpoints, and used the concept of 'state of exception' of Agamben (1998; 2005). Accordingly, state officers are granted authority to decide who to include and exclude when people cross the border. To cross borders through official channels,

travellers are required to show “submission” to the state (Salter, 2008, p. 373) by identifying themselves and justifying their crossings. Salter (2008) believed that a state of exception occurs when power is exercised by states over people as officials temporarily ‘suspend’ juridical or legal processes. The most common reasons for such ‘suspensions’ are the states’ peace and order, such as the US suspension of normal law after the 9/11 attacks when President Bush authorised “indefinite detention” of non-citizens accused of being terrorists (Agamben, 2005, p. 4). To create a state of exception, the state needs to determine who is excluded, such as stateless persons and those regarded as terrorists (Agamben, 1998). Agamben (2005, p. 1) said that borders are where states of exception occur and that “the question of borders become all the more urgent.” However, the position of this thesis is that the state of exception does not always occur along the whole length of borders. It may take place at border checkpoints and mobile police checkpoints. It must be noted that there are border areas where people live their lives with their routines and are not faced with the border and checking by state officers. In these areas, different spatial negotiations of borders take place between people in borderland areas and state officers. The people who live in these areas do not perceive the border as a territorial line that divides two groups of people in the same way as the centres of states. Therefore, Salter’s use of Agamben’s term of state of exception at borders refers to only parts of them.

Similarly, a number of scholars proposed that though borders are not conceptualised at the physical borders but located inside states, the states still exercise their sovereign powers at checkpoints in the areas. For example, Vaughan-Williams (2009) highlighted the case of the temporary suspension of juridical and legal processes in the justification of UK police killing a foreigner suspected of being linked to bombings in London in 2005. The state of exception in this case occurred well within the physical edges of the state. This killing was described as the practice of including and excluding lives that do not belong to the UK state. Vaughan-Williams (2009) introduced the concept of biopolitical border practice by which potential migrants are monitored before they reach UK territory. After this “offshoring the border,” biometric data are installed to record people’s personal information in the second layer of “identity capture” (Vaughan-Williams, 2009, p. 20).

Biopolitical border practice is also noted at physical edges of states (Topak, 2014). The more intensive the surveillance, the more biopolitical reality reveals, as shown by border-crossers from Turkey to Greece entering the EU who wished to escape surveillance. As a result, they crossed via the Aegean Sea and many drowned because they tried to escape from arrest by the EU police (Topak, 2014). The deaths and attempts to escape from police are testimony that, although the state sovereign power remains hegemonic in deciding who is permitted entry, people still try to negotiate ways to continue their journeys. Foucault (1998, p. 140) stated that biopolitics is “the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life.” Foucault’s idea of biopolitics focuses on management and administration of lives and Topak (2014) applied this concept with the EU verification of migrants who crossed the Aegean Sea border. Deaths occurred as a result of modern “surveillance systems” established by European Border Surveillance System and funded by the EU (Topak, 2014, p. 822). EU coastguards in Greece intercepted migrants and discouraged their journeys by talking to them and telling them to go back to Turkey. Those migrants in boats were often forced to go back, and were arrested once they managed to cross the border (Topak, 2014). These experiences of biopolitical border management occur when states perform “identity checks, and police raids” (Topak, 2014, p. 818). In the case raised by Topak (2014), border-crossers were strictly policed, very different to the case of the Thai-Lao border in this thesis where quasi-state checkpoints are in operation. However, some similarities exist, especially at formal border checkpoints where border-crossers are monitored and at mobile checkpoints established by Thai-Lao state officers’ arbitrary judgement.

More developed technology has been implemented at some borders. For example, the Registered Traveller Programme (RTP) has been launched to ensure security “at European Union’s borders” (Leese, 2016, p.412), protect against threats, and speed up the processing of approved travellers (Leese, 2016). At EU borders, border policing looks for “terrorism, illegal migrants and crime” (Leese, 2016, p. 421), and suspects are defined as “risk” to EU (Leese, 2016, p. 427). As a result of long queues at border checkpoints due to careful border management, Smart Border Package to detect threats flowing onto European soil was introduced to make the passage of ‘bona fide’ travellers quicker and more convenient. Personal information of travellers was recorded before they visited the checkpoints (Leese, 2016).

Frontext coordinated with EUROSUR (European Border Surveillance System) to install modern technology for surveillance. The equipment involved robots, satellite remote sensing, cameras, and drones of unmanned aerial vehicles (Jones & Johnson, 2016).

Jones and Johnson (2016) reported the use of similar military technology of surveillance in the US War on Terror in Iraq and Afghanistan and on the US-Mexican border. The former US President Barak Obama ordered 1,200 military officers to guard this border in an operation called the Operation Phalanx (Jones & Johnson, 2016). However, there are areas along the Thai-Lao border where quasi-state checkpoints are run by local administrations for crossings without such modern technology for surveillance. For example, the doctoral thesis of Rungmanee (2014) studied the blurred features of legality and illegality of border-crossings at quasi-state checkpoints on this border. Also, Santasombat (2008) found that on many occasions, local border-crossings do not use any form of checkpoint, especially on the upper-Mekong Thai-Lao border. Kinship ties, very commonly, are facilitators for border-crossings in these areas without having to resort to the formalities of the state.

Nail (2013) studied the situation on the US-Mexican border by using three Foucauldian analytical concepts, sovereign power exercised over border-crossers, disciplinary power, and biopolitics. Firstly, Nail (2013) explained the concept of sovereign power as having juridical suspension and binary exclusion. Juridical suspension refers to situations when juridical procedures are suspended when border-crossers are judged to be threats to the state. The example used by Vaughan-Williams (2009) involved a bombing suspect in 2005 in London. The suspect was shot dead by the police without them resorting to juridical processes. The British officers who shot the suspect used sovereign power and peace and order of the state to justify the killing (Vaughan-Williams, 2009). Next, the notion of binary exclusion refers to the concept of the boundary separating what is inside and outside, and therefore anything judged to be a threat to the state is not permitted to enter state territory. In addition, physical punishment is operated by state officers under the name of the sovereign as occurred in the case of the terrorist suspect killed by the UK police in 2005. In the analysis of sovereign power, Nail (2013) said

that Agamben's point of view towards sovereign power is not sufficient for borderlands because Agamben focused too much on the state-centric framework. For example, Agamben (1998) argued that the analysis of sovereignty is important to understand biopolitics. However, Nail (2013) said there are other frameworks that can clarify the situation in borderlands better, such as disciplinary power and strategies the states employ to control border-crossings. With these frameworks, a bottom-up point of view is proposed. Second, disciplinary strategies of the state as ways of management of border-crossings are proposed in the examination of borderlands. Nail (2013) said that disciplinary techniques involve surveillance. The technology of surveillance proposed by Foucault (1980) involves Jeremy Bentham's idea of Panopticon (Semple, 1992). Ability to observe others is one form of the exercise of power. In this case, a state authority has the power to survey border-crossings meaning that state officers are in a more superior political position. Foucault (1980) used the example of the Panopticon, a hexagonal design controlled by a room in the centre used by such places as hospitals, boarding schools, and prisons. The invigilator in the room in the centre keeps an eye on every room surrounding it so that wrong-doers may be identified. Patients, students, and prisoners are unable to observe the invigilator. To correct citizens with a gaze is the most "humane method to maintain discipline" in the society (Semple, 1992, p.119). In this way, observed persons need to control their actions. On the US-Mexican border, technology of surveillance includes walls, barbed wire, points of control, cameras, and floodlights (Nail, 2013), as disciplinary power is exercised under the name of the sovereign. People who cross the borders also correct themselves where to cross and how (Nail, 2013). Nail explained that the patterns of migrants crossing borders could be compared with workers in factories or prisoners in prison in that they acted as directed by timetables (2013, p. 120). In the same sense, border-crossings through checkpoints follow the temporal dimensions of timetables. Third, biopolitics means "the administration of the bodies and management of life" (Foucault, 1998, p.140). In borderlands, it may also refer to identity records and police raids, and may also be used to explain state punishment of people who cross borders (Nail, 2013). Nail (2013, p. 128) argued that with biopolitical practice, the state needs institutions like "prisons, detention centres, armored transport, and surveillance technologies."

Similar to the EU case discussed by Leese (2016), border checkpoints are constructed on the Thai-Lao border for the benefit of people such as tourists. Those with citizenship and secure economic status tend to be approved when-crossing (High 2009). Poor people who want to cross the border for better economic opportunities are marginalised when they use these channels, as shown by the experiences of the researcher's participants from *Champassak*, Lao PDR looking for jobs in Thailand who lived more than 50 kilometres away from the checkpoint. High (2009) said that, despite a campaign by members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to promote people's connectivity, this kind of connectivity needs to operate through formal checkpoints. Such an approach benefits the elite more than poorer people. A number of agreements were signed by the two states to record undocumented Lao labourers' access to Thai territory through such formal border checkpoints (High, 2009; Rungmanee, 2014, 2016). High (2009) focused on long-distance travellers, such as those who lived in *Champassak* and sought jobs in the hinterland of Thailand. When they made crossings, those of inferior economic status faced difficulties and discomfort at border checkpoints. Rungmanee (2014) focused on both long-distance travellers and local borderland people who avoided this marginalisation at formal checkpoints by crossing the border at quasi-state checkpoints set up by local administrations. Rungmanee pointed out that, in the case of *Mukdahan-Savanakhet* on the Thai-Lao border, border-crossers through quasi-state checkpoints are not arrested and not always marginalised because the crossings are regarded as licit by locals.

Secondly, spatial negotiations are noted in research of everyday border-crossings. The people in the borderlands simultaneously subvert and embrace the logic of national borders. In many areas, states do not always monopolise checkpoints and grant certain levels of authority to local administrations for border management. Borderland people attempt to cross borders by avoiding official checkpoints. Miggelbrink (2014) reported that EU members provide laws to allow local borderland people to cross into the EU from non-EU countries. As a result of 1931/2006 Regulation in line with the Schengen Border Code, no visa is required for local residents. However, certain conditions apply, such as proofs of local residency, regular crossings, and absence from the banned Schengen list. Miggelbrink found that local residents of non-EU countries are often denied access to the EU due to

lack of a “well-founded reason” for their everyday crossings (2014, p. 157). Spatial negotiations were noticed by Miggelbrink in the form of smuggling as it was noted that a number of traders from Belarus tried to cross the border to Poland by hiding goods such as shoes, phones, and clothes, making false declarations, and offering bribes.

Spatial negotiations among state mechanisms and border-crossers were similarly noted on the Thai-Lao border as they do not simply reject the existence of national borders but embrace them for their everyday crossings. For example, the Economic Quadrangle Joint Development Corporation (EQJDC) was established to facilitate trade in mainland Southeast Asia in the late 1990s (Walker, 1999). Initially, a number of state mechanisms were set up along the border to avoid informal border-crossings. However, Walker (1999, p.4) noted people’s complaints about difficulties of cross-border trade, and being “harassed” by Lao state officers at *Chiang Khong* (Thailand)-*Houay Xay* (Lao PDR). Therefore, they had to negotiate so that they were able to cross the border more conveniently. Very often, informal cross-border activities are more favoured by state officers than by newly-established state institutions in the areas. Border-crossings become more complicated when different state institutions are in conflict (Walker, 1999). These activities rely very much on personal relations, such as the sharing of food between local people who cross and those who wield state power. Theoretically, traders from *Chiang Khong* (Thailand) are able to cross to *Houay Xay* (Lao PDR) without passports and their movements are limited within that area. If they have good relations with state officers, they may go further north for business without business visas. Politics of the locations of the checkpoints also play a role. In 1994, Thai boat-owners who had crossed the Mekong in their everyday lives through the same old pier for a long time were suddenly told to change the pier due to the establishment of the Harbour Department. Boat-driving licences were required, resulting in initial frustration and inconvenience among local boat-owners (Walker, 1999). Local boat-owners and traders were aware of this situation and embraced the state mechanism of borders on the one hand and exploited the political situation among Thai state officers on the other. The locals accepted the logic of national borders but at the same time did not want their movements across them impeded (Walker, 1999). This example shows the states’ attempts to control the location of the border-crossings but the crossers

may or may not conform. They negotiated with the state officers who were implementing the policy made by the centres of the states (Bangkok and Vientiane). On many occasions, Walker (1999) noticed that the existence of personal relations with local state officers resulted in local people not always crossing the border according to Thai state regulations.

A decade later, Sankhamanee (2009) advanced the concept in a study of the Mekong border by adding the natural dimension to Borderland Studies with the application of the term 'riverscape.' This describes Thai-Lao long-distance traders varied perceptions of the Mekong River in their everyday practices of dealing with seasonal dynamics and state regulations. While the term 'river' is a geographical feature that acts as a means of communication and resource, the term 'scape' is about people's "vista, impression, interactions, and meaning given" to the river itself (Sankhamanee, 2009, p. 2). The river is a space of life but it is also part of the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) ratified by Burma, Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam that aims to transform the river into an economic corridor (Sankhamanee, 2009). Mekong borderland people embrace this inter-state logic and implement it in their everyday activities. For example, Thai products can be sold in a higher price when they cross the border to Lao DR. Sankhamanee's research participants who were transnational traders from *Luang Prabang* (Lao PDR) adopted the Mekong as their home and their trade route, and their journeys seldom required immigration registration because of their personal relations with state officers who were supposed to document the trading products. Like Walker (1999), Sankhamanee found the logic of liberalism that promotes trade in the Mekong basins relies on the assumption of national borders and inter-state trade needs to be recorded. However, people in this riverine area use their personal relations with state officers to hide such records for economic benefit.

Thirdly, research of borderlands discussed the dynamics of the border in two ways. One way is that the border is dynamic in itself because its natural features change according to the seasons. The other way is that the dynamics occur because of inter-government policy that affects the inter-state relations. On the one hand, natural changes affect people's movements in the area. Lamb (2014) stated that there are approximately 200 rivers employed globally as state borders, and investigated the

opinions of local people and state officers regarding the construction of a dam on the Salween River on the Thai-Burmese border that significantly affected the course of the river and thus the location of the border. The study found that the lives of the border people also change because they use the river for fishing and transport. Because the changes of the course of the river affect the people, it was proposed by Lamb (2014) that the opinions of the borderlands people be heard. The voice of the people along the border was defined as “border talk” (Lamb, 2014, p. 20) and the natural terrain border was perceived as dynamic in that the river was constantly changing due to the seasonal changes. In the dry season, when the river dries up, the river could not be used as the marker of the territorial edge anymore and only the locals claim to know where the territorial edge of Burma is located. Additionally, people attached to the borderland employ its natural terrain to facilitate their movements. Therefore, the logic of state borders as a technology by the state to control people means little to their movements. In times of political conflicts among ethnic minorities in Burma, the logic of state borders must be reconfirmed and that affects the continuation of border-crossings. On the other hand, the policy changes from the centre of the state are another dynamic feature of the border. Megoran (2010) examined the Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan border reified in Stalin’s era. The creation of this border was at odds with borderland people’s wishes as they lived in the mountainous area of the Ferghana Valleys in Central Asia and enclaves of both nationalities resided in both countries (Megoran, 2010). The separation at this border was felt in 1993 when the then Uzbek President Karimov announced the closing of the Uzbek border to contain the flow of Russian currency (Megoran, 2010). Before the announcement of this closure, people crossed the border freely, even though there were checkpoints. Consequently, some bridges that crossed the border were demolished. Visas were required if people wanted to cross the border. It means checkpoints also became stricter. Uzbek villagers did not agree with these developments, feeling that their normal activities were interrupted. In the area studied by Megoran (2010), the mountainous landscape significantly shaped the peoples’ spatial practices that were at odds with the wishes of the state. Even when the boundary was strictly controlled, people who lived there used the mountainous landscape to cross the border without state approval and participated in smuggling activities (Megoran, 2010).

2.4.2 Temporal negotiations

Temporal elements have not been totally ignored by scholars in Border Studies and Borderland Studies, despite the lack of direct and explicit mention. Temporal elements tend to be included in the analysis of everyday practices, activities that are repeated daily until they are taken for granted (Lefebvre, 1971; 2000; 2002). The notion of everyday may be clarified sequentially. First, two types of temporal dimension are described as cyclical and linear to give an overview of the application of the temporal concept with people's activities. Second, the two types of temporal dimension are constitutive and elaborated when the concept of everyday practice is discussed. Accordingly, the linear and cyclical natures cannot be separated. The examples of cyclical activities may be that people in a riverine border fish the river every day. The duration of the journey between home and river may be defined as linear. In other words, when the temporal linearity is repeated, it becomes cyclical. Also, control of this cyclical nature by the state causes this type of temporal dimension as defined by Hutchings (2008) as '*chronos*.' Third, temporal breaks must be mentioned, as everyday activities are often interrupted by certain unexpected events. For example, people who usually fish the river without being interrupted may be suddenly stopped by state officers who follow state *chronos* that does not allow certain kinds of undocumented crossing activities into practice at that time. This temporal rupture is defined by Hutchings (2008) as '*kairos*.' The fishers have to relate their past experiences – how they had crossed the border uninterrupted – and what to do next – to conform to *chronos* or not – in order to continue their journeys over the river. Hutchings (2008) proposed that '*kairos*' and '*chronos*' should be viewed as shaping each other in temporal analysis of social science. Lindroos (1998) further outlined the concept of *kairos* as not simply a temporal break but also judgement whether people involved in everyday activities conform with *chronos* or not. Therefore, the term *kairos* is used to describe the actual practices that people pursue in their everyday lives. This *kairos* is always involved in the process of judgement. Accordingly, this sub-section reviews the literature in Border Studies and Borderland Studies that theoretically considers temporal dimensions. Initially, it examines the research in Borderland Studies of temporal elements, although the researchers did not explicitly and directly mention the notion of time. The notion of everyday practices is the key concept among scholars categorised in this group.

Secondly, this section reviews literature in Borderland Studies that directly mentions temporal dimensions.

The first group considered everyday practices in their research. The concept of everydayness was described by Lefebvre (1971, 2002, 2003) as the activities often neglected by the academic domain. The importance of everydayness is to highlight the extraordinary of the ordinary, such as the daily border-crossings. For example, Johnson and Jones (2014) compiled a chapter titled *Placing the Border in Everyday Life* about the everyday practices of people who live along borders. The notion of everyday in conjunction with border-crossings is that the activities must happen frequently (Johnson & Jones, 2014). Accordingly, the cyclical dimension of border-crossings is stated and the concept of *chronos* is implied in the analysis. In this book chapter, Miggelbrink (2014) stressed the notion of everyday practices that people in borderland areas encounter in their lives, especially in the area of informal cross-border trade commonly found in Eastern Europe. In this case, the spatial negotiations in the everyday lives of the border people involve borders that separate groups of EU and non-EU people, and the identity checking of state officers at the borders (Miggelbrink, 2014). Temporal dimensions are brought into the spatial negotiations of Miggelbrink (2014) as the spatial ones occur daily. Some people are issued with status of non-visa checking requirements so that they may cross borders without much interruption and more conveniently. Others are rejected non-visa status because they are unable to provide proof that they are local residents. However undocumented border-crossings continue.

Temporal dimensions, especially the kairotic dimensions of people who cross borders, are not directly discussed by scholars in Border Studies and Borderland Studies. Nevertheless, some examined undocumented border-crossings that may be regarded as kairotic. For example, temporal dimension was expressed by Smart and Smart (2008) in the form of speed as some people's journey tends to be slowed down, such as those of undocumented labourers. Smart and Smart parodied the idea of Harvey (1991, p. 260) that the world is in the era of "time-space compression" with the phrase "time-space punctuation" (Smart & Smart, 2008, p. 175). They stated that the world is borderless for some people but others' temporal flows may be interrupted. Border checkpoints between Hong Kong and mainland China were

highlighted as some persons' movements across the border were not stopped while others such as undocumented labourers experienced "full stops" and were denied entry (Smart & Smart, 2008, p. 175). The authors used 'semi-colon' as a metaphor for those who had to show visas and/or work permits, and 'comma' for the elite who had visas and felt more secure (Smart & Smart, 2008, p. 175).

The notion of *kairos* is not directly mentioned but can also be implied in the research of Coleman and Stuesse (2014). While focusing on the notion of everyday practices, Coleman and Stuesse (2014, p.38) used the term "routine practices" in the analysis of the policing of Mexican labourers who crossed the border to the US. In this case, the linear feature of temporal dimension is implied as the duration of the undocumented labourers crossing the border was included in the analysis as the police checks delayed them. People who cross borders are legally recognised as they go through the chronotic state channels but Coleman and Stuesse implied that those who are undocumented are kairotic. Their journey is kairotic because it involves the judgement whether to cross the border or not and whether to conform to the state timetable at the checkpoint or not. Similarly, in the area of the Thai-Lao border, temporal dimensions can be detected in the academic writings although temporality was not explicitly discussed. Rungmanee (2014, 2016) explored the "grey areas between legality and illegality" (2016, p. 221) of undocumented border-crossings at *Mukdahan-Savannakhet*. These undocumented border-crossings take place at quasi-state checkpoints which "loosely adhere to legalised immigration practices and formalities" (Rungmanee, 2016, p. 221). These local checkpoints are in operation on the condition that people record their names and pay 5 baht per entry from 04.00 to 20.00. Overnight stays are not permitted (Rungmanee, 2014). Those Lao people who work as farm labourers often overstay, sleeping in small shelters or accommodated by their employers. These transgressions are generally ignored as local officers concentrate on liaising with communities in the detection of drug- and people-smuggling. Rungmanee (2014) did not directly use the temporal concept of *kairos* to define the situation. I argue that to cross border through quasi-state checkpoints may be defined as *chronos* because the timetables are organised by the local administration in *Mukdahan*. However, overstaying means that the labourers' time is kairotic, because they have to make a judgement about interruption of their journey if they did not conform to the state *chronos*. Rungmanee (2014) found it

difficult to clearly distinguish between legality and illegality, and I add that differentiating between *chronos* and *kairos* is also difficult and blurred. This blurred situation of *chronos* and *kairos* may be used to analyse similar situations where quasi-state checkpoints are in operation.

The second group of scholars is those who directly and explicitly include temporality in their research. Some scholars paid attention to (but did not actually use the term) *kairos* more at borders, especially when border-crossers were stopped and delayed. Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) developed an analysis of temporality at borders based on the amount of time taken for labourers who want to cross the border to find jobs in countries that offer better economic opportunities. However, Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) were aware that migrants who cross borders may experience different kinds of time when their status is checked. Those migrants with skills in demand are subject to different temporal conditions than those with less desirable skills. Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) stated that different times in negotiations depend on the political subjectivities of the people who wish to cross. Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) focused on non-EU labourers looking for jobs in EU territory. The notion of *kairos* was further emphasised by Reeves (2016) who analysed time in relation to border-crossings and identified a temporal factor due to uncertainty and delays caused by unplanned happenings in the entered nation-state. Despite the term *kairos* not being explicitly referred to, Reeves (2016) found that the possibilities of temporal disruptions occur in everyday practices along borders and should not be seen as exceptional. Reeves (2016) used the example of participants who crossed the border from Kyrgyzstan to Tajikistan and suffered damage to a car. The temporal dimension of time was included when the flow of the journey was stopped by the incident. The participants did not want to go to the police because they were Kyrgyz and were afraid that the police may not help them arrest the culprits as the incident happened in Tajikistan (Reeves, 2016).

In summary, a number of scholars who examined undocumented border-crossings implied temporal dimensions in their research. However, I call for more explicit examination regarding time, especially the interplay between *chronos* and *kairos*, as it provides a deeper interpretation and clearer picture of the pluralities of border-

crossings. The temporal dimensions also complement the analysis of spatial and political subjectivity negotiations of people who live in the borderland areas.

2.4.3 Negotiations of political subjectivity

The topic of political subjectivity has been examined by a number of scholars in Border Studies and Borderland Studies. Foucault (1985, p. 28) stated that political subjectivity is the knowledge about the self which consists of “self-reflection, self-knowledge, self examination.” What individuals consider in regard to self-conduct is also morally conditioned and was described as “a set of values and rules of action” which influences “family (in one of its roles), education institutions, churches, and so forth” (p. 25), termed by Foucault as “multifarious social relations” (1994, p. 95). Changes in political subjectivity depend on people’s everyday practices. Indeed, political subjectivity is the construction of identity that depends on a particular history of a society and discursive knowledge (Critchley, 1999). This section categorises scholars in Border Studies and Borderland Studies into two groups to support the argument that negotiations of political subjectivity contribute to the notions of spatial and temporal negotiations in the examination of the pluralities of border-crossings. The first group contains only one author who proposed the analysis of identity of borderland people which is not directly related to political subjectivity but the two shape each other. The issue was discussed by Howarth (2013) offered two steps that relate identity to political subjectivities. Initially, symbolic identification produces a “mirror-stage” effect (Howarth, 2013, p. 246), a contrasting picture of an image in a mirror, and results in the identification of oneself in relation to others. That results in the behaviour of the subject identifying oneself in relation to others, as one compares the self with other people. Next, the process of striving to achieve completeness never stops and individuals are always in the process of becoming and changing. The second group is those scholars who directly examined the notion of political subjectivities.

The notion of identity was applied in the analysis of borderland people in *Shabe* region on the Beninois-Nigerian border (Flynn, 1997). *Shabe* region is similar and relevant to the *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* area in two ways. Firstly, seasonal dynamics and the natural landscape play a crucial role in the cross-border activities

on the *Okpara* River. Conditions become difficult in wet seasons for travellers by truck and on foot and long-distance traders need local communities' assistance to pass through their areas using canoes. This difficulty contributes to the formulation of the identity of the people in the borderland area as people who want to travel through the area have to rely on them. Secondly, unequal levels of modernisation in the territories on both sides can be noted on the Beninois-Nigerian and Thai-Lao borders. Catholic missionaries in the 1970s supported the construction of a number of secondary schools and the Dutch government financially aided the health care services in Benin. Therefore, this Benin side of the *Okpara* River is considered to be more modern (Flynn, 1997). On the Thai-Lao border, the Thai territory is considered to be more economically developed than the Lao side because of different political systems during the Cold War (Rigg, 2005, 2007, 2016). In both two cases, the identities of the people are attached to the borderland areas which use the rivers to define themselves. However, Flynn only focused on the notion of identity and this views the borderland people in *Shabe* as unified people. This thesis sees that there is not one single identity of borderland people as pluralities of spatial and temporal interpretations continue to take place. As found in the case of *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*, different people with different identities have different modes of border-crossings.

The notion of political subjectivities has been used for a more nuanced analysis of border-crossings. Tangseefa (2006) examined the political subjectivity of displaced Karen who fled political violence in Burma to Thai-Burmese border areas. Applying the concept of state of exception and bare life of Agamben (1998, 2005), Tangseefa (2006) said that this displacement stripped the Karen of their citizenship and left them without legal protection¹³. He argued that the stories of these people were often ignored because of their statelessness, being devalued as merely noise – *phone* (the noise of people treated as if they were non-political actors) not *logos* (the sound of political actors that are worth listening to). Tangseefa (2006) argued that the voices of the displaced Karen need to be politically recognised if human beings are political subjects. In his fieldwork, the war zones were spaces of exception where

¹³ This phrase is '*la vita nuda*' in Italian but was translated by Tangseefa (2006) as 'naked life' instead of 'bare life'.

juridical protection over the Karen was absent. The Karen therefore faced situations in which they may have been killed at anytime and those who killed them did not have to be prosecuted. On the issue of political subjectivity, Tangseefa (2006) went further by stating that some Karen groups spoke slightly different languages so they did not present a unified front to their common opponent, in this case, the Burmese Junta. To project the Karen political subjectivity, therefore, their voices would turn to be *logos*, not *phone*, and the identity of Karenness was formulated as a strategy to counter the oppressive regime in Yangon. Drawing on Spivak (1990), identities were contextual and strategically practised by political actors for their own benefit. Tangseefa reconfirmed that the strategic production of identity was a way of producing political subjectivity and the Karen made themselves “perceptible and intelligible” (2006, p. 407). The camps in which they were placed were officially referred to as “temporary shelter areas” (Tangseefa, 2006, p. 407) and these constituted states of exception (Agamben, 2005; Salter, 2008). However, this thesis argues that this situation did not involve the lives of the people who cross the border every day. People’s temporal dimensions of their everyday border-crossings are implied but the temporal pluralities may be paid more attention.

The analysis regarding political subjectivities is better explained in the borderland research of Agier (2016) that explored the political subjectivities of Hutu people who fled Rwanda in 1994 and were forced to stay in border camps. Agier (2016) stated that these people’s political subjectivities arose from social limitations, in this case, displacement due to civil war, and their ability to represent themselves to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as victims of civil war. Agier (2016) defined the character of political subjectivity with the features of self-representation (a moment to express oneself) and relations with the self explained in the words of Foucault (1985) as “self-reflection, self-knowledge, self examination” (1985, p. 28). What individuals take into consideration for self-conduct is also morally conditioned, described by Foucault (1985, p. 25) as “a set of values and rules of action” which influences “family (in one of its roles), education institutions, churches, and so forth.” Foucault (1994, p. 95) called this “multifarious social relations.” Care of the self in Foucault’s reading of Socrates in relation to the definition of political subjectivities has to rely both on the self and others. According to Agier (2016), the Hutu people tried to show that their exodus resembled that of Moses. In Foucault’s

words above, this may be described as values and rules of action. They presented themselves as victims of the civil war in Rwanda and alluded to themselves in biblical terms and as putting moral values of action into practice. A political subject is moreover formulated in a moment when that person has a chance to express him/herself; it is not frozen but always relates to others (Agier, 2016). This self-representation by the Hutu was related to political subjectivities because they tried to define themselves to UNHCR as similar to victims in the bible.

The analysis of political subjectivities is advanced as temporal negotiations are included in the work of Mezzadra and Neilson (2013). Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) examined the political subjectivities of labourers who tried to cross borders from non-EU to EU zones for better economic opportunities. They found that borders shape people's subjectivities when they cross them and the border-crossers "challenge the sovereign machine of governmentality and its entanglement with shifting regimes of exploitation" (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013, p. 239). Mezzadara and Neilson examined how the workers position themselves as "political and legal subjects, citizens, and persons" (2013, p. 280) and found that labourers who managed to cross borders and found jobs in EU zones were often non-citizens lacking legal rights to health care.

In short, the works of Flynn (1997), Tangseefa (2006), Agier (2016), and Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) are examples of the study of the political subjectivities of border-crossers. Agier (2016) wove spatial negotiations with the notion of political subjectivities as the Hutu tried to portray themselves to international organisations as victims. However, the notion of temporal negotiations is not yet one of the foci. Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) analysed political subjectivities with spatial and temporal negotiations but the focus group was international labourers involved with long-distance travellers. This thesis aims at the various and flexible political subjectivities of those who live in the borderland areas as done by the work of Flynn (1997) and Tangseefa (2006). Nevertheless, Flynn (1997) only focused on the notion of identity which may still be advanced, and Tangseefa (2006) examined the lives of those in camps of displaced people perceived to be the state of exception in the war zone, very different from the everyday practices of people along borders.

The political subjectivities focused on this thesis differ from the literature mentioned above. Indeed, the analysis of political subjectivities in this thesis is involved with the *Thai Ban* who make everyday border-crossings in the area with quasi-state checkpoints. The Mekong border as a space combined with the temporal dynamics of the natural terrain is introduced into the analysis.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature in Border Studies and Borderland Studies that focused on spatial and temporal dimensions of borders and the political subjectivities of border-crossers. However, this literature did not analyse the three concepts in together. This thesis aims to examine these three elements together to shed light on the pluralities of borderland people who reject, subvert, and conform to the logic of national borders and are thus constitutive of Third Space.

In my thesis, political subjectivities, and spatial and temporal negotiations are interrelated. The formulation of political subjectivities changes depends on the changing meaning assigned to the space of the Mekong border. Also, temporal dimensions are involved in judgements to cross the border according to the way in which state *chronos* shapes political subjectivities. This judgement whether to conform to *chronos* or not is accordingly defined as *kairos*. The political subjectivities in my thesis therefore shape and are shaped by the society in the borderland, an in-between space. As the Third Space, the territorial border does not only separate two national spaces but also connect them.

The next chapter provides the rationale for the methodology that helps answer the research question of this thesis. The methods of participant observations, interviews, and reading of essays and interpreting visual presentations are outlined in detail.

Chapter 3 - Methodology: Non-sedentary Interactions

3.1 Introduction

The riverine border of *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* is an appropriate area to answer the research question that asks *What are the ways in which unofficial modes of border-crossings by the Thai Ban along the Mekong Thai-Lao border are practised in their everyday lives and how can these unofficial modes of border-crossing be theorised as a contribution to existing Borderland Studies?* This is because *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* is the area where the river border becomes a terrestrial one as the river flows into Lao PDR and the river border is replaced by a mountainous border. The uniqueness of the border should not be taken for granted, especially when the *thalweg* changes depending on the seasons because of changes in the water level. Border-crossing activities of the *Thai Ban* are affected by such seasonal changes. This border area raises interesting questions about the everyday dynamics with the river as the Thai-Lao border. Most formal border practices and some literature accept a world order based on a sedentary assumption. However, the continuous movements of people that cut across the borderline expected by the state to contain the flow of the people coexist with the practice of the sedentary norm in the form of territory. Therefore, I describe the movements over this borderland as the area of the Third Space. Also, I propose an epistemology drawing on Goodhand (2005, 2008), using a border-centric perspective in which the analysis of cross-border activities focuses on the conditions of the border. Through ethnography, I further examine the everyday practices of the people throughout this thesis as a perspective that considers patterns of routine when people cross the border in different seasons as the basis for analysis. This thesis analyses everyday practices, drawing on Lefebvre (1971, 2002) and De Certeau (2002a, 2002b).

Within such a perspective, the focus on political subjectivities, the ways in which people position themselves in relations with other people in different contexts, is used to analyse crossings of the *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* riverine border. In the area, the seasonal dynamics in people's everyday lives and state regulations affect

border-crossing activities. Mezzadra and Neilson (2013, p.66), in their research in the “Global North” on class conflicts and financial reasons for border-crossings, proposed that the political subjectivities of labour migrants in the ways in which they position themselves are a product of their struggles across borders. They are delayed by state immigration controls at borders, introducing a temporal aspect to the situation. While accepting the contribution of Mezzadra and Neilson (2013), I argue that the political subjectivities of border-crossers relate not only to the movement of labourers but also to the everydayness of subsistence economy on the Thai-Lao Mekong border. This often forms the basis for the choice of modes of border-crossing of the borderland. The political subjectivities of the people emerge due to their familiarity with the area when crossing the border. In addition, the notion of riverscape and borderscape proposed by Sankhamanee (2009) as the way Thai-Lao long distance traders interpret the meaning of the river border, is used to analyse the everyday practice of dealing with seasonal dynamics and quasi-state regulations in the area. The term *riverscape* influences the ways in which political subjectivities are formulated partly because of the river. Firstly, riverscape indicates the area adjacent to the river. It also indicates that the river as a natural terrain influences the meaning-making of the people who live there. Secondly, when the meaning-making is practised, it influences the ways in which different people position themselves when they interact with the river and with different people who interpret the river differently. In short, the term riverscape implies that people’s political subjectivities depend on others, state and non-state actors, and the natural terrain, in this case the Mekong.

In this chapter, I outline the theoretical scaffolding in four steps in support of my ontological standpoint that a sedentary norm should not be prioritised. First, the assumption that the world is sedentary is discussed to give depth to my analysis. Second, the centripetal approach taken in this thesis is described in detail. On the basis of these two steps, I then discuss the particular understanding of everyday practices and the temporal dimension, and elaborate the specific understanding of political subjectivities used in this thesis. Last, the methodology section discusses the appropriateness of ethnography, especially participant observations, to answer the research question and to understand the different modes of border-crossing activities from the participants’ perspectives. Other methods used to complement

participant observations are reading participants' essays, interpreting the drawings of participants, and interviews.

3.2 A sedentary world

The origin of a sedentary world can be traced back to the establishment of Westphalian states in 1648 as it is the era of the origin of the modern state – the form of state that shapes international politics and international political theory nowadays (Walker, 1993). This Westphalian mind-set that people and space were separated was practised in Europe and exported to the rest of the world by colonisation (Soja, 1989). Ruggie (1998) explained the spatial practice shift from feudalism to a modern state in Europe in the seventeenth century as Western Europe changed from feudal states in which territory was not fixed to ones in which it was fixed. The modern political space thus became “distinct, disjoint, and mutually exclusive territorial formation” (Ruggie, 1998, p.172), and more rigid territorial borders were practised among sovereign states.

This norm has been accepted in both the theory and practice of international politics and is based upon the assumption that people's lives are sedentary in that they have roots, and live and die in their particular place of birth. When the state aims to control its people, it does so in a defined territory with juridical power. Boundaries are drawn to define that limit. As this norm is monopolised by the centre of the state, it becomes state-centric. This state-centric paradigm gives rise to the idea that people live in the country of their citizenship, and those who move across modern state boundaries are exceptional. This sedentary world and the spatial lines that contained people's movements became manifest in the thinking and map-drawing of enlightened Europe, reflecting a European way of looking at the world (Ó Tuathail, 1998). These maps are ocularcentric, offering three visions, the stage of the whole world over which a geopolitical gaze can be applied, a fixed scene for strategic international politics, and a distantiation gaze – the ability to compress time to understand location from a long distance (Ó Tuathail, 1996). Ocularcentrism focuses more on space over time and after a viewing of a map, one is able to understand the location of places without having to go to the site. Space becomes depoliticised, totalised, and de-

temporalised, leading to the assumption that people and spaces should be exclusively separated based on their states, and those whose movements cut across borders are seen as abnormal. The epistemology of “fabrica mundi” (Mezzadra & Nelson, 2013, p.35), the process by which the world was mapped, went hand-in-hand with the brutality conducted by the Europeans in their colonies. The following chapters in this thesis, with the epistemological counter to this *fabrica mundi*, show that ocularcentricism reduces the critical reflection of spatial and temporal negotiations, especially those that occur in borderlands.

I believe that the construction of a border at the spatial edge of the state as an in-between space requires examination. A focus on the edges of states as starting points is not simply to reverse the analysis but to emphasise that borders are territorial, economic, juridical, and political junctions. Tangseefa (2006) and Nail (2016) called this the in-between space where different groups of people are in contact. Hence, a definition of a border given from the centre is insufficient to understand the heterogeneous forces in this in-between space (Tangseefa, 2006). Indeed, the in-between space divides two spaces but it also connects them. The division introduces a new path, and the border becomes a bridge for people to cross. Some people’s journeys continue, even though space is supposedly divided into two, and some are impeded.

Consequently, the border as an in-between space becomes a Third Space rather than a simple line that separates two territorial states. Nail (2015, 2016) raised three elements about people’s movements, flow, junction, and circulation. Flow refers to people and capital that cross borders. Social flow cannot be stopped but can only be slowed down or redirected. Flow has two features, conjoined and disjoined. Conjoined flow is continuous and allowed to cross the border. However, disjoined flow may be temporarily stopped. For example, Nail (2016) said the US-Mexican border wall stops the flow of undocumented migrants but approximately 3,000 holes have been dug under the wall by people who want to cross the border. Attempts are made to stop the flow of people but people still struggle to cross borders if they want to. Junction also has two features, limit and non-limit. A limit junction, such as a formal border checkpoint, acts as the final stage of the territorial margin, filtering newcomers and rejecting and redirecting undesired people and capital. Sometimes,

the undesired flow may be stopped and/or slowed down. A non-limit junction is a composition of larger circuits in which the flow can move both ways across the border through a variety of channels. In terms of circulation, a series of different types of junctions are identified. Nail (2016) called them circulation and re-circulation. In the former, the process of the flow is identified as those who enter first, then exit, such as tourists. Re-circulation occurs as the flow exits and then attempts to re-enter. Deported, undocumented migrants who re-enter the state are examples of this. Flow, junction, and circulation are unique characteristics of the 'in-betweenness' of border areas that involve the everyday practices of the local people, the technology that polices that area, the social acceptance and refusal of incoming flows, and the people who secure the border.

As discussed above, Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) criticised the ontology of 'fabrica mundi' that has been put into practice along with the sedentary norm. This sedentary norm materialised in the forms of Westphalian states. Arguing that the sedentary norm co-exists with people's mobility, Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) called for an epistemology that counters the fabbrica mundi assumption. In this chapter, I therefore propose that the centripetal approach that analyses the pluralities of people's mobility in the borderland helps to achieve the desires of Mezzadra and Neilson (2013).

3.3 A centripetal approach

A centripetal perspective sheds light on the 'in-between' nature of borders because analysis starts at and hence focuses on the borders rather than at the centres of states. To focus on the margins of states is the first epistemological counter to the assumption of a sedentary world.

The study of the border should be examined from the perspective of the borderland as the focus rather than from the centre of the state (Sahlins, 1989; 1998). He studied the Pyrenees borderland between France and Spain from the perspective of the people who live on both sides of the valley who have their own way of life, especially the Catalan people scattered in Spanish and French villages. In the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the national logic of a boundary that separated two national spaces was embraced by Spanish and French villages because this logic benefitted their claims for places for pastures and water. Nevertheless, smuggling, which did not conform to the national territory logic, continued. Sahlins looked at the borderland using historical information to propose that the co-existence of the national territory logic and the subversion of people who lived in the mountainous border area be recognised. However, no term with this approach was coined.

Goodhand (2008) introduced similar terms to describe the framework that considered the border from the perspective of the borderland itself, using a more contemporary example on the Afghanistan border. Initially, he proposed two ideas, centrifugal and centripetal. The former refers to attempts by people in border areas who can economically rely on themselves and are likely to move from the state. Centripetal is defined as the state control of enclosure that looks from borders towards the centre (Goodhand, 2008). Centrifugal may not be relevant in my thesis because, though it focuses on border-crossings, I am interested in what happens in the Third Space at and around the border associated with Thai territory. Consequently, the notion of centripetal movement is more appropriate but, despite some similarities with Goodhand (2008), its use in this thesis is not totally in line with his definition. Centripetal does not infer the sense of state control as Goodhand (2008) formulates, but only the analytical focus on the edges to the centre. Goodhand (2008) said that academia focused on how the centre of the state shapes the border, but how the border shapes the centre is understudied. Mainstream social science literature treats borders as the space to be crossed but not as entities of their own existence. As a result, conditions and exchange activities in the borderland are not sufficiently heeded.

A centripetal approach has been employed to analyse the border-crossings at the Thai-Lao Mekong riverine borderlands by Walker (1999), although he did not exactly use that term. Studying borderlands, Walker (1999) raised a question regarding the assumption that the border is always explained and described by the centre of the state, Bangkok and Vientiane in this case. Therefore, Walker's fieldwork of *Chiang Khong* and *Houay Xay* was likely to be treated as peripheral if that is approached

from the centre of the state. However, Walker (1999) urged that this perspective of the border be questioned and said that the assumption the borderland people are “marginal” is partial. If the focus is placed on the borderlands, another picture of border-crossing activities emerges (Walker, 1999). Focusing on the borderlands, despite not employing the term centripetal, Walker (1999) argued that a clearer picture of the ties of the people who live in two national spaces is presented and that these ties pre-dated the Westphalian boundary established in colonial days. The picture of people’s negotiations of everyday border-crossings is also explained from another angle, not with the state as the focus. I argue that, as a result, with the centripetal approach, the everyday practices in the borderlands are highlighted so that the extraordinary is recognised in the ordinary, a feature stated by Lefebvre (1971, 2002, 2003) in the importance of the everyday notion in social science.

3.4 Temporal analysis: Everyday practices matter

Temporal dimensions in social sciences have been explained in two ways by Hutchings (2008). First, *chronos* refers to the modernist interpretation of time of formal schedules, often controlled by the state (Hutchings, 2008; Lindroos, 1998). Second, *kairos* is the actual judgement whether or not to conform to *chronos* in a particular situation (Lindroos, 1998).

Nevertheless, mainstream social science, especially International Relations, in the post-Cold War era has a different stance. It tends to view *chronos* as normal and unidirectional time while *kairos* is regarded as the time of the transitional phase as indicated by Huntington (1993). Huntington said that history came to an end after the conclusion of the ideological conflict of the post-Cold War era and humanity entered a new phase of conflicts of civilisations. The 9/11 incident between the Islamic and free world under US supremacy supported the argument of the time of civilisation conflict. Meanwhile, more optimistically, Fukuyama (1992) used the concept of *kairos* to explain the fact that the history of humanity ended after the Cold War. Fukuyama (1992) recognised the triumph of economic liberalisation of US in that all states embrace free-trade. Although Fukuyama (1992) may not have been aware of the temporal dimension in regard to relations between *chronos* and *kairos*, his temporal

conceptualisation signals that *chronos* marks the end of time when history is narrated. Hutchings (2008) criticised the temporal conceptualisation of both Huntington (1993) and Fukuyama (1992). Hutchings (2008) rejected these two explanations in terms of a relationship between *kairos* and *chronos* in that *kairos* was not necessarily seen as the end of time in history. Hutchings (2008) proposed that one should recognise hetero-temporal accounts of world-political time and called for the analysis of how such different sets of temporal practices of different people defined as 'heterotemporality' shape *chronos* differently. To recognise heterotemporality is the first step before the development of the thinking that considers alternatives to common and unified world-political time. The temporal analysis of the relationship between *chronos* and *kairos* presented in my thesis poses one example of an alternative to world-political time that takes place in the borderlands as a Third Space. As elaborated, it is the temporal dimension of in betweenness when *kairos* and *chronos* shape each other. This means that *kairos* is not always conceptualised as an exceptional phase that interrupts the unidirectional flows of chronotic time. Based on the notion of everyday practices of Lefebvre (1971, 2000, 2002), when time is interpreted by people along the border, the in-between nature of the endless relationship between *chronos* and *kairos* is revealed.

In Borderland Studies, a spatial analysis is not sufficient because people interact in space and time (Axelson, 2013; Little, 2015). Thus, I propose to methodologically add temporal dimensions in the analysis of borderland studies. My stance regarding temporal dimensions is that I still take *chronos* as the time controlled by the state. However, *kairos* involves decisions to break or conform to *chronos* in the schedules (Lindroos, 1998; 2008). I argue that kairotic moment explains the everyday practices of the people especially when it shapes and is shaped by chronotic schedules. The everyday border-crossings which are the foci of this thesis are based on timetables of the state and the people making crossings interpret time in their decisions to conform to the state or not. When the everyday notion is integrated with the temporal analysis of Hutchings, everyday activities can be both chronotic and kairotic because they are involved with repetition, progress, and decay.

Temporality can be explained by the two terms of cyclical and linear by Lefebvre (2002). Cyclical rhythms are defined (Lefebvre, 2002, p.53) as "lower depth" in which

people require little time and space. Linear activities start and end at particular points of time, such as journeys from home to work. Lefebvre (2002, p.53) said that these are of “upper depth” as they need more space and time. Accordingly, in this thesis, I propose that kairotic moment occurs in both cyclical and linear rhythms as the people who make crossings have to judge whether or not they should conform to the cyclical timetable of the state *chronos*. The analysis of cyclical and linear temporality helps explain how the people’s process of meaning-making and how time is practised in their everyday lives. This is because when kairotic moment is noted in cyclical and linear rhythm, the temporal flow will be interpreted as stuttering that does not necessary go in line with *chronos*. The everyday practices are in addition described as the representation of the meaning-making process and it is helpful with the analysis of everyday life at borders. The term ‘everyday’ refers to practices that occur frequently (Johnson & Jones, 2014; Lefebvre, 2002). As the everyday practice framework is important but neglected by state-centric perspectives (Hobson & Seabrooke, 2007), I propose to apply the framework at the border. In that area, daily practices matter not only at the local level but also internationally as they occur at the edges of states. That people follow patterns of routines throughout the day and give meaning to living with and on borders is different to people in other areas. Drawing on Lefebvre (1971, 2002, 2003) and De Certeau (2002), I employ everyday practices as a strategy to argue that borders act as borders at the same time as the area being borderless, depending on the spatial and temporal contexts.

Lefebvre (2002, p. 70) stressed that everyday life gives meaning to people’s everyday lives and emphasised relations between individuals and others with the link to “political consciousness to the level of the political.” The everyday practices are therefore constitutive to people’s consciousness and their regular activities. For example, television helps an individual make meaning of the world and allows “every household to look at the world” without participating, so that “signs and significations roll” over them “like a succession of waves” (Lefebvre, 2002, p. 76). To better understand people’s expression in their everyday lives, their perception and consciousness of the construction of the world needs to be examined. These meaning-formulation processes in people’s everyday practices are constitutive to people’s political subjectivities – the ways in which they interpret their social position in relation to others in society.

3.5 Political subjectivities of the *Thai Ban*

The border is a space that produces “heterogeneous political subjectification/ subjectivities” (Tangseefa, 2006, p. 413). Political subjectivity is the way in which people position themselves in power relations with others. Different groups of people have different modes of self-positioning – different political subjectivities -- when crossing borders depending on the context, and these modes change very quickly when the context changes. This section discusses the notion of political subjectivities of the *Thai Ban* weaving two elements. Firstly, I explain how language plays a role in everyday practices and the formulation of political subjectivities. According to my observations, different dialects of the Lao language from Lao PDR, Isan-Lao, and Thai are spoken. Some people can change their accent very quickly – for example from Lao to Thai due to the influence of Thai television in Lao PDR. This change of accent and language contributes to changes in the political subjectivities of the people both in Thailand and Lao PDR who make undocumented border-crossings. If the undocumented Lao employees in Thai territory are blended with their Thai isan kins, they are less likely to be caught by Thai police and feel more safe. Secondly, I elaborate the term riverscape to argue that the natural terrain matters to people’s meaning-making process in their everyday lives. Thirdly, when the interpretation of the meaning is practised, it influences the ways in which different people position themselves when they have to interact with the river and with different people who interpret the river differently. Indeed, people’s political subjectivities depend significantly on the practices of others and the natural terrain. This is especially in the area where the *Thai Ban* live as they rely significantly on subsistence economy with the river as their own mode of border-crossing.

3.5.1 Semantic fields as meaning formulation in everyday practices

In people’s everyday practices, meaning is formulated in people’s consciousness and their political subjectivities. Accordingly, language plays a role as mediation, helping people describe objects and places around them. Lefebvre (2002, p.276) defined the process of describing the world around people’s everyday lives as “a

semantic field.” In this field, people are both the object and the subject; they interpret others and vice versa all the time. The concept of a semantic field is thus necessary to explain people’s meaning-making process and it has four elements: sign, signal, symbol, and image (Lefebvre, 2002). First, sign can be defined as language and can be both audible and visual. For example, the pronunciation of a word ‘cat’ in English is a signifier of an animal that has four legs and makes a noise similar to ‘meow’. That animal is signified by the word cat. The order of the letters ‘c’, ‘a’, and ‘t’ form the visual part when they are written. Second, signal can also be a sign but has more function and contains an imperative element. For example, when driving on the road, one stops upon seeing a red light and proceeds on a green light. The red light commands people to stop and allows them to go on green. This signal is a practice and becomes the truth because of its repetition. Third, symbol differs from both sign and signal in that it binds people together in their own group; sense of belongingness is constructed. For example, a cross is significant for Christians (Lefebvre, 2002). Fourth, image is similar to symbol but differs in that it is “an individual work” (Lefebvre, 2002, p. 287). It is similar to symbol as it can set and arouse people’s emotions. Magic of ancient rituals is an example as the magician’s practice aroused the feelings of people who participated in the rituals (Lefebvre, 2002). Lefebvre (2002, p.309) presented a city as an example of the occurrence of meaning-making, as buildings, such as “the stadium, the temple, the agora, the forum, the theatre” create meaning, and streets are similar to everyday lives, occurring repeatedly. Signs, signals, symbols and even sometimes images are present in streets. They are interpreted and embedded in people’s consciousness. I emphasise the need to analyse the meaning-making of people along the border and argue that the four semantic elements can also be found in their everyday lives.

When meaning-making is expressed, it can also be contested. In a situation in which a river is used by a state as a border, the meaning-making process and its practice are contested by a number of people with different political subjectivities. While the state imposes the meaning of a river as a line that separates two states, local *Thai Ban* perceive it differently, such as a place to catch food for their everyday living. Sankhamanee (2009) employed the term ‘riverscape’ to describe different people’s varied perceptions of the Mekong River. While the term ‘river’ is a geographical feature that acts as a means of communication and resource, the term ‘scape’ is

about people's "vista, impression, interactions, and meaning given" to the river itself (Sankhamanee, 2009, p.2). The four semantic elements are involved with the meaning-making process of the people who live along the river, especially when the river is defined by the state as the border. The river then becomes a political construct and the meaning is contested by the people and the state, this is particularly expressed by the everyday practices of those who live with the river as border.

3.5.2 Riverscape

Sankhamanee (2009) proposed the use of the term riverscape to describe people's meaning-making and performances towards and along the river border, arguing that it explains two aspects of geographical perspectival dimensions. Firstly, it explains the locations of adjacent communities, state officers, and villagers in the riverine zone. Secondly, riverscape refers to how these people give meaning to the river border. The meaning-making of *Thai Ban* thus is formulated in conjunction with the geographical location of the river as a border imposed by the Thai and Lao states. The meaning of the river is very often contested by the people who live there as the river is also a means of transport, a place to catch food based on the season, and a sacred space that spiritually binds people on both banks. Interpretations of the border and the river as a border formulate people's political subjectivities in the area. Signs and symbols mentioned in the previous section do not necessarily and objectively signify the signified but change, depending on the context. This shapes the ways in which different people view the world and their relations with others. For example, Howarth (2013) used the case in the area where there is no river border. In British politics, the word 'privatisation' contains more meaning than simply to privatise national assets. British people, who experienced the times when privatisation policies were launched, relate to the feeling of life in the UK under the Thatcher Administration. To non-British people, privatisation may mean something different. That different people interpret the relation between the signifier and signified differently is defined by poststructuralists as the "floating" of meaning (Howarth, 2013, p. 243). This explanation is used by poststructuralists to counter the mainstream social science theorists' insistence that the relation between the signifier and signified is always fixed. Similarly, other signifiers such as the words 'river' and

'border,' are interpreted differently by different people, especially when the meaning is put into practice of the *Thai Ban* people, local state officers, entrepreneurs, and tourists. As I outline in the empirical chapters, the meanings assigned towards the Mekong River border are endlessly produced and reproduced.

3.6 Methodology

This section discusses the methodology that has guided the design and implementation of this thesis. It is organised into six sub-sections. Firstly, it focuses on the research settings, *Khong Chiam* and *Sanasomboun*. Secondly, it discusses the access to and recruitment of research participants in Thailand and Lao PDR. Thirdly, the description of the sampling criteria and the profiles of research participants are described. The main research ethnographic methods adopted for the study, including participant observations, essay readings and visual presentations, and interviews, are examined in detail in sub-section four. The fifth sub-section concerns analysis and interpretation. The last sub-section provides a critical reflection on positionality and ethical challenges faced in the research, including my experience of being threatened and checked by security state officers.

3.6.1 The border of *Khong Chiam* (Thailand) and *Sanasomboun* (Lao PDR) as a research setting

The issue of where to conduct ethnographic research has long been debated in anthropology. Malinowski (1966) favoured ethnographic research to be performed by individuals in colonies a long way from their homes. For example, Gupta and Ferguson (1997) disagreed with Malinowski, believing that ethnographers must do fieldwork in the colonies. However, Passaro (1997, p. 154), as an American anthropologist, completed ethnographic research focusing on homeless people in New York and argued that the homeless were part of American "internal colonization." This means that ethnography does not always have to be conducted in the colonies. Even though the research was located in New York, the ethnography was effective as it presented erased pictures of marginalised people in an urban setting. Passaro's work did not fit the model dominated by ethnographic distance

proposed by Malinowski. My research field of the Thai-Lao border of *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* is located partly in my home state.

The research is based on an extensive period in Thailand. As a Thai national, I am not required to ask for approval to conduct research within Thailand. On the other hand, to ask for approval from the government of Lao PDR takes “more than a year,” as experienced by High (2011, p. 37). As I was expected to do fieldwork between March and August 2016 and to submit the thesis by April 2018, I was unable to wait to be granted such approval as described by High (2011). As such, I restricted my research activity to the Thai area. However, given I was living with the people at the border I did engage in border-crossings with my political subjectivity as a Thai national visiting Lao PDR.¹⁴

According to the bilateral joint communiqué of the two states in 1988 (Pongern, 1998), the local administrations along the Thai-Lao border have the authority to decide what days and times people can cross the border without having to go through a formal checkpoint. Different borderlands have different timetables. For example, in my fieldwork, there are checkpoints held by local state officers on both sides. On the Thai side, naval officers are on duty from 06.00 to 11.00 on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays to check newcomers from Lao PDR for prohibited items. On the Lao side, however, Lao state officers are supposedly on duty to collect a ten baht fee from newcomers (approximately 20 GB pence) everyday from 08.00 to 17.00, but passports and ID cards are not checked¹⁵. Visitors are unable to go beyond the area of the village in the host state and have to return to the home state before 17.00 through this informal checkpoint (this differs from crossing at a formal

¹⁴ Ethical clearance and risk assessment was undertaken and signed off by the university (February, 2016) before I went on fieldwork

¹⁵ The timetable of when to cross the border is quite arbitrary. This is because I was not able to acquire formal documents that indicated the time of when Lao citizens could cross to Ban Dan. When I tried to ask for the formal documents from state officers in the area, the conversation was diverted to other topics. When I asked other *Thai Ban* people, different information was given. Some said that Lao people was allowed to make crossings from 08.30 to 17.00. Others said it was between 08.30 and 16.30. Only the days of the week, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, were certain information. I similarly asked Soimart Rungmanee (2017) who conducted her PhD thesis in the area where quasi-state checkpoints were in operation in *Mukdahan-Savannakhet*. She said she was unable to acquire formal documents either. This meant the regulations on the timetable were loosely practised at these checkpoints.

border). Despite these checkpoints arranged by the local administrations, the *Thai Ban* frequently cross the border unchecked, especially those with their own boats.

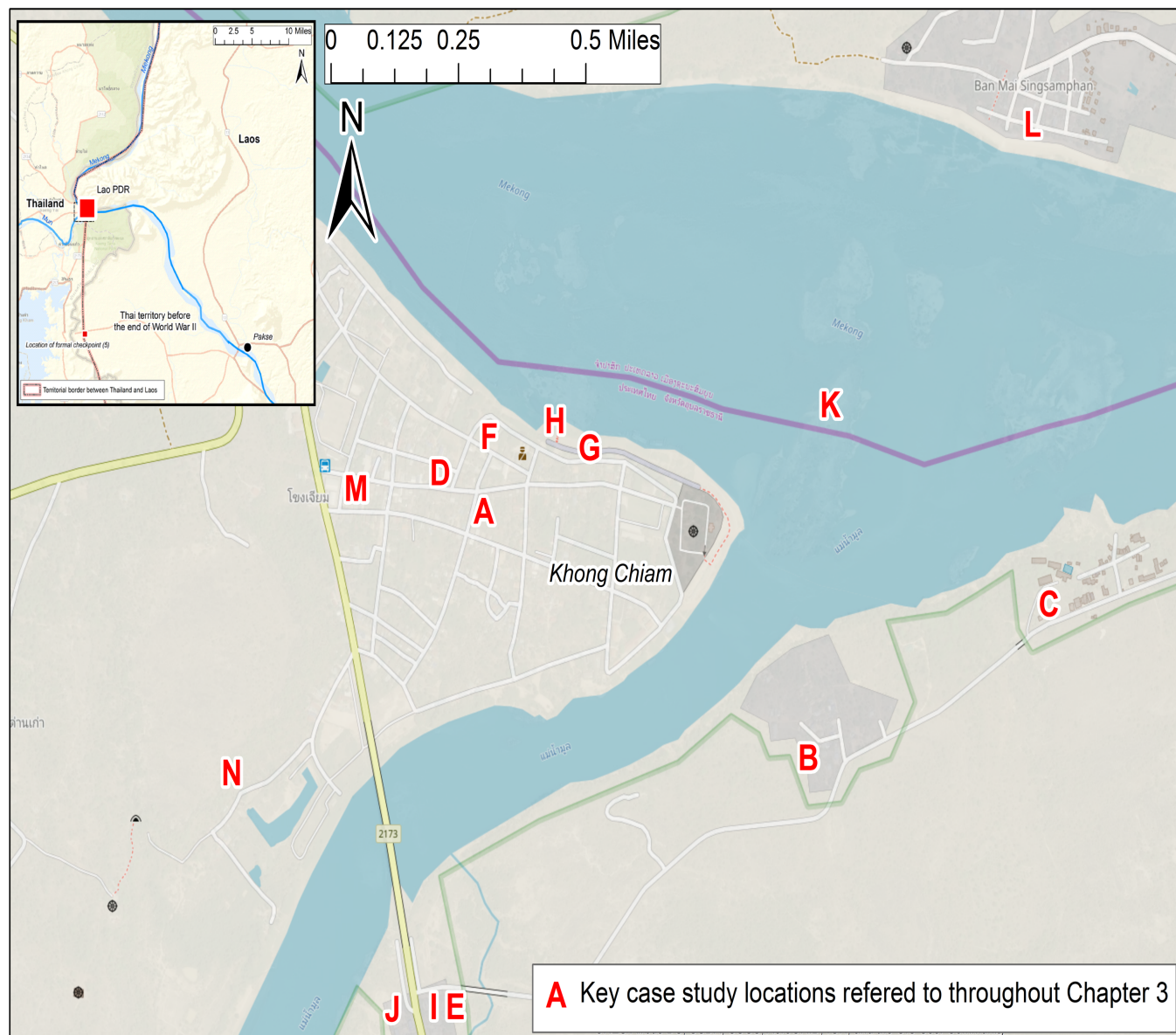


Figure 1 – The overall picture of ethnographic site that covers five villages in two nation states.

The fieldwork research period was six months from March to August 2016 which allowed me to establish trust with participants in the field. The March to August period is significant as it covers the dry season for the first two months and the wet season for the rest of the period. The water level in the Mekong changes significantly in these six months (Bureau of Research, Development and Hydrology, Department

of Water Resources, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, 2016). This coverage of the dry and wet seasons helps answer the research question regarding the effects on the everyday spatial practices at the riverine border. In dry times, the *Thai Ban* cross to the Lao territory more easily. In the wet season, more difficulties are encountered due to the greater volume of water but fishing is still conducted in Thai and Lao territories by persons from both sides of the river without seeking border-crossing approval.

I arrived in March and decided to stay in *A* (see Figure 1 on page 67). The area of *A* is located in *Ban Dan Khong Chiam Municipality*, covering the area of two villages called *Ban Dan Mai* and *Ban Dan Kao*, which formally has the population of 2,727 people.¹⁶ I believe the number may be higher due to undocumented Lao newcomers. This is an area where civil servants who move from outside *Khong Chiam* and tourists expect to stay in low-cost overnight accommodation. At the beginning of May 2016, I felt I could learn more about everyday practices of daily cross-border activities of the *Thai Ban* by moving to *Ban Tha Phae, Khum Pak Mun*, (*B* in Figure 1 on page 67), a village where most residents are stateless and undocumented Lao migrants. The core *Ban Tha Phae* which covers the area of *J*, *I*, and *E* (see Figure 1 on page 67) is where, before 17 December 2015, there was a “human-trafficking” clean-up¹⁷. *Ban Tha Phae* is an area where a number of subversive economies take place. Security state officers considered it unusual for an upper middle-class person to rent a house there, explaining why I was checked by Thai police officer in the first week I moved in.

In July 2016, after receiving a threat from a suspected trans-state drug dealer, I moved to stay in *C* (see Figure 1 on page 67), a five-star-hotel which accommodates overseas tourists and upper-middle ranked civil servants. In August 2016, I returned to stay in *D* in *Ban Dan Municipality* (see Figure 1 on page 67), while keeping a rented house in *B*. I worked as an English school teacher of three classes from

¹⁶ I was given this figure by a state officer at the Ban Dan Municipality. He showed me the report he was going to submit as a strategic plan for education from 2015-2019. I was not allowed to make a photocopy but to take a picture of the cover of the report which was typed in Thai.

¹⁷ Human trafficking is the movement of persons by means of deceit often holding them in captivity for illegal economic purposes as defined by the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The term clean-up refers to concerted activity by state law-enforcement units to counter such un-lawful activity. National News Bureau of Thailand used the term crackdown.

Mondays to Fridays. On Saturday, I taught students interested in taking university entrance exams. From time to time, after school, during my stay in *B*, I accompanied one of my participants in his everyday activities around the area of *K* and *L* (Figure 1 on page 67), a Mekong island and a village called *Bane May Singsamphane* in Lao PDR.

Previous research reported that the Thai side of the river is more economically wealthy than the Lao side and hence, more Lao people cross the border to find jobs (Rigg, 2005; 2007; 2014). This geo-economic characteristic affects the direction of the flow of the people and capital as, on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, more Lao citizens cross the border to buy goods and take them back to Lao PDR than Thai people shop on the Lao side.

3.6.2 Access to and recruitment of research participants

Gaining access to the *Thai Ban* villagers' social setting and recruiting research participants from those involved in subsistence economies were particular challenging. As a researcher, I needed to overcome challenges such as time limitations, difficulties in building trust with prospective participants who are suspicious of state officers, and reaching participants in remote areas where violence may occur. Other difficulties were the participants' lack of motivation, especially the students, some, only agreeing to participate because of their easy-going lifestyle, but never tried to write an essay and submit, even though the submission meant 25% of their school grades. Gender and age issues were obstacles as there were times when prospective participants involved with subsistence economies were willing to be interviewed but, as females and aged below 18, a parental consent form was necessary but not forthcoming as their custodians were suspicious of my intentions. Those aged above 18 were also suspicious of my intentions and did not want to sign any documents. This limitation resulted in an imbalance of data from people who crossed the border. More people in Thai territory were happy to sign consent forms while those from the Lao side tended to decline, though some were happy to give me oral information without having to sign anything.

Access to the field was via a gatekeeper, the Director of *Khong Chiam Wittayakhom School*, who agreed to facilitate the research in March 2016. I was introduced by a relative who had conducted Teaching English as a Second Language classes in the area. In the first stage, I observed the community to develop a familiarity with the area before asking people to take part in the research. Notes were taken about the people – the way they dressed, the topics they talked about, and their economic activities. Great care was taken about political and power relations, for example, close relationships with state officers and local business entrepreneurs may have affected access to information from other persons. I was fortunate that my main gatekeeper was a respected member of the community and the *Thai Ban* tended not to be as critical of the school director as other state officers were. In this Thai-Lao context, civil servants are the persons respected by villagers who are basically involved in subsistence economy. Realistically, it is unlikely that a villager would question what a teacher says and/or does. This helped in my existence within the community.

Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun is a sensitive area where transnational drug dealers are active and there was a big clean-up of prostitution in December 2015. Therefore, state officers are often suspicious of a newcomer. Since I introduced myself as a teacher and researcher to the community, to stay in *A* (See Figure 1 on page 67) was normal. Yet, as I moved from *A* to *B* (See Figure 1 on page 67), the Thai police came to check my ID card. In early May 2016, two men not in police uniforms approached me from behind and asked to see my driving license and national ID card. However, I knew that their actions were illegal so I asked them to show their police ID cards instead. It turned out to be that their ranks were below sergeant which, according to Thai law, meant that they had no authority to check a Thai citizen's ID card. On that day, quite a few of my participants told me to be careful because there had been cases in which the Thai police orchestrated drug-related events for which they were able to arrest persons who they did not like. It was suggested by my supervisor at Loughborough University, after communication via e-mail, that I report this to the Head of the Provincial Police and informed him of the objective of my doctoral project. Yet, I was warned by local business entrepreneurs that in doing that, I would have to give the police a bribe anyway so that they could

guarantee my safety. Indeed, I did inform the police of my academic objective but did not give them bribe money.

3.6.3 Research participants

The number of participants in the research is 67. They are composed of 13 male participants and 54 female participants (see Figure 2 on page 72). The oldest participant is 49 years old and the youngest is 16 (see Figure 4 on page 73). As I entered the fieldwork as a teacher, 55 of the participants are students aged below 18. Four of these serve at a restaurant and coffee shop in their free-time (see Figure 3 on page 73). It is interesting to find that two business entrepreneurs are civil servants at the same time. There is one fishing boat operator and one housemaid who I observed in their daily routines, and there are two waiters, one of whom crossed the border to work undocumented. There is one masseuse happy to participate in the research. At the end of the fieldwork, it turned out to be that data collected from students, which constituted the majority of data, could only be used in the basic background environment in the community. Though I interviewed two students for deeper information on everyday border-crossings apart from reading their essays, the data were useful only at the basic level related to days of the week people can make crossings, people who do not have to cross at quasi-state checkpoints all the times, and the major arrest of prostitutes in the karaoke bars. For deeper data that were about power negotiations, I rely, in the empirical chapters, mostly on the participants who fish and local state officers because they were the persons I spent most of the time with. Apart from the interviews, I also participated in and observed their everyday activities.

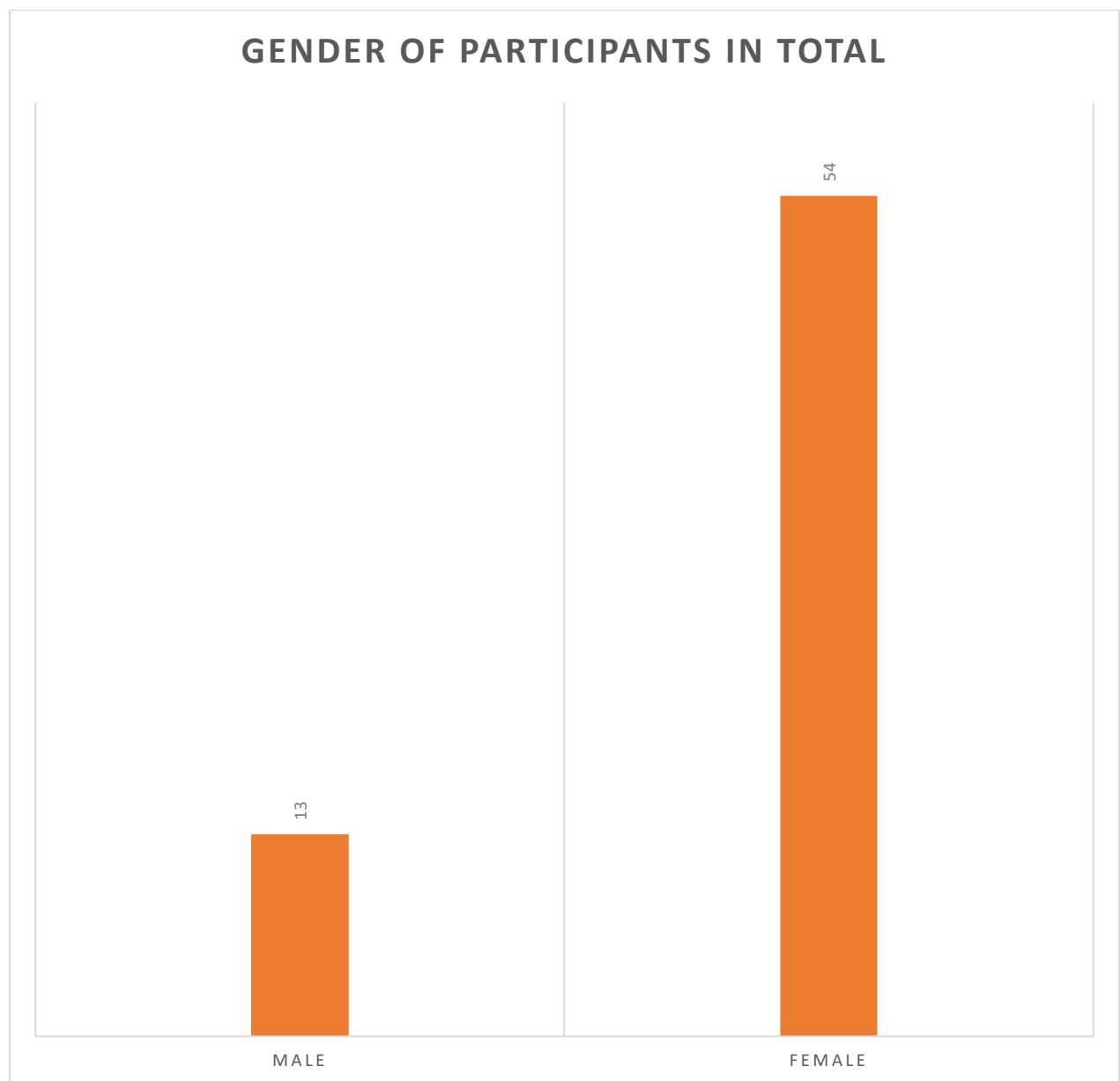


Figure 2

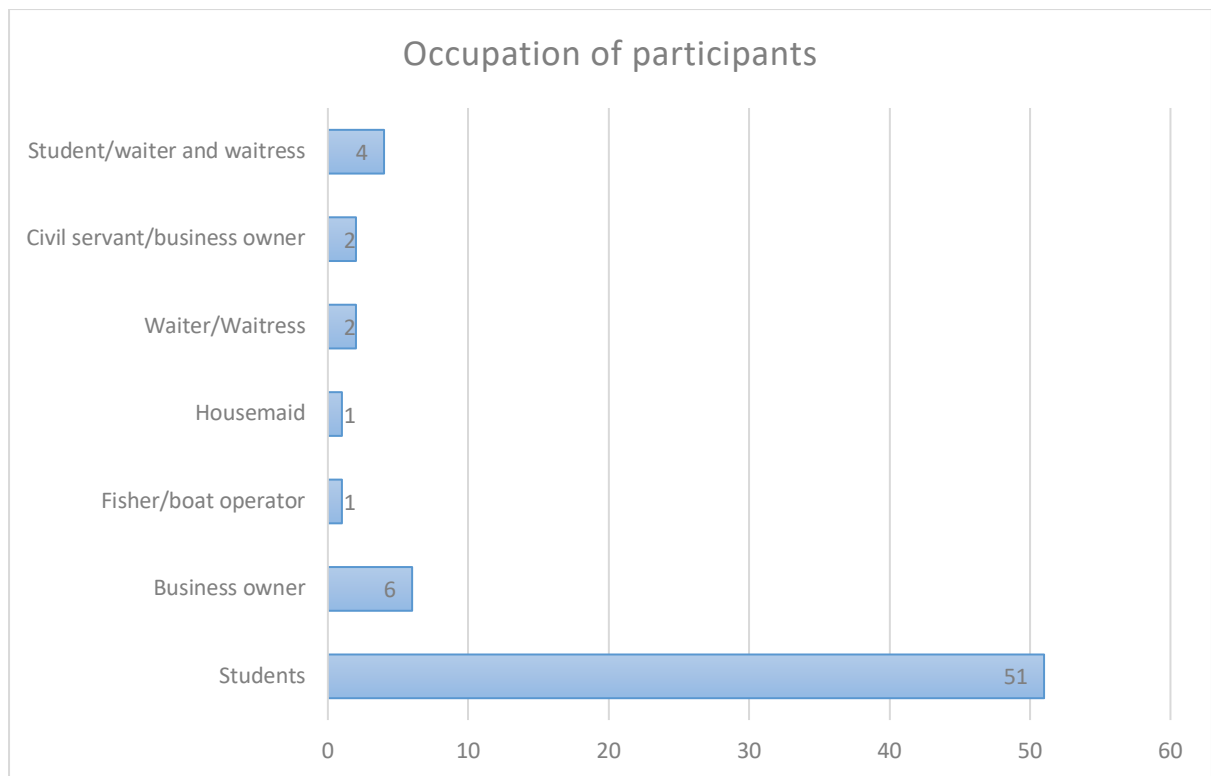


Figure 3

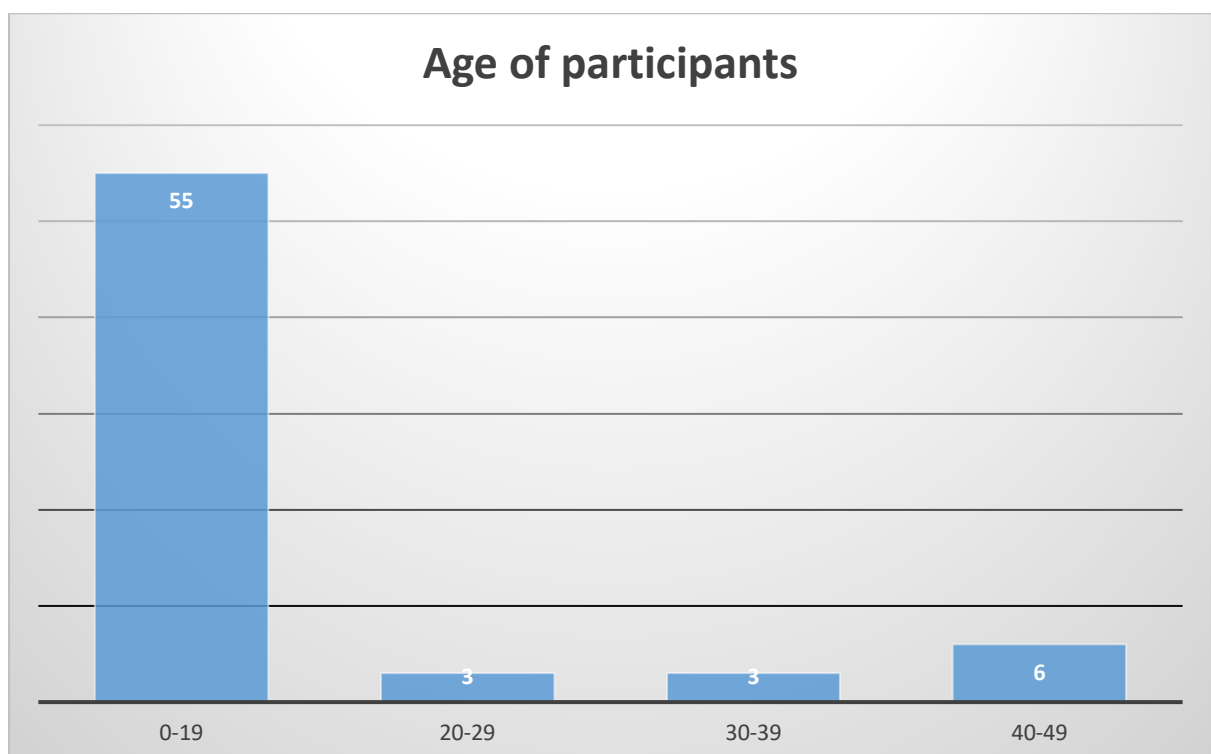


Figure 4

From March to August 2016, I taught unofficial and official English Reading and Writing courses to approximately 140 male and female high school students as a contribution to the community and also to develop a familiarity with the lives of the teenagers. However, only 55 of them submitted the writing assignments about their everyday lives properly and signed the consent form¹⁸. Although this period covers the summer vacations of the Thai school academic year, the lessons aimed to train students for university entrance exams. Part of the data collection was to ask students to write five essays of 100 words each¹⁹. All writings by students were collected, with the writer's parents' permissions. Visual presentations in the form of drawings of the Mekong were acquired in the final stage of the fieldwork. I expected that this feature was appropriate because it showed how meaning was assigned to the river border. Also, these participants were part of the generation that were directly experiencing the introduction and effects of the economic integration of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community that promotes the ability to "support ease of travel" and "people connectivity" by 2025 (ASEAN, 2016, p. 8).

Three members of the Thai-Lao local fishing community and their families acted as important informants in chapters 4, 5, and 6 as they were not state officers representing the state-centric paradigm of the practice of borders. These members were crucial informants in my fieldwork because first of all, not many people were willing to talk to a stranger in this borderland. Two of them, initially, as a husband and wife were happy to talk to me so they were the persons I relied on and participated in their everyday lives. The wife is *de jure* a stateless person under *To Ro 38*²⁰. She is defined as a 'Lao migrant' in the Thai Central Registrar. During the day she worked as a waitress in a restaurant beside the Mekong. From March to September 2016, during festive times, she was the boat queue organiser for her husband who provides crossing service to tourists. Her husband plays a major role in

¹⁸ More information about the writing assignments is indicated in the following sections.

¹⁹ The problem regarding the number of words is that Thai students are not used to academic writing style. This is also another justification why data collected by student can only be used as basic background. No teacher at this school had ever assigned any writing assignment, even in Thai. As a new teacher, I tried to persuade them to write, but not many agreed to do so.

²⁰ According to 2008 Regulations of Central Registrar, non-Thai citizens who stay in Thailand need to be officially recorded in the computer system and *To Ro* identity cards were introduced. *To Ro 031* is used as a birth certificate, and *To Ro 38* is to record personal information (Saisunthorn, 2012).

this thesis because he frequently took me across the border. He used to have dual citizenship but later his Lao citizenship was revoked because, according to Lao law, one is allowed to be a citizen of only one state. At the time of the fieldwork, he was a full Thai citizen. Later, the third major participant came in as she was a Lao citizen who sought a job in Thai territory – undocumented. She stayed in the house of this wife and husband in the fishing community.

The everyday lives of the fishing community rely heavily on the river and I took part in daily tasks. The six months of fieldwork is insufficient to establish trust among the participants whose everyday lives are engaged with undocumented border-crossings. This resulted in the decision to use the members of only one family as participants. Trust was strongly established between the three participants and myself, which also helped me to develop trust with other family members and neighbours who live around his house. Even an undocumented labourer was happy to give me an interview and signed a consent form because the wife of my major participant helped me guarantee her safety and confidentiality.

This focus on one family may be seen as a drawback. However, I argue that the family members have different status and have different political subjectivities. The male participant that I call Ken in this thesis was a 40-year-old Thai citizen, and his 36-year-old wife, Soi, was stateless under *To Ro 38* as is discussed in the empirical chapters²¹. Sometimes, Soi's Lao relatives crossed the border to look for jobs and stayed in their house for months without formal documents. Also, Ken crossed the border every day and Soi worked in a restaurant run by a state officer. Pluralities of border-crossings can be observed in this one single family as routine procedures. This variety in one family shows the big picture of the community of the small local administration of *Ban Dan Khong Chiam* (population 2,727). The Third Space elements of spatial negotiations, temporal negotiations, and political subjectivities were observed in a range of ways in the everyday activities of this family's members who engaged with others and the river border.

²¹ Both Ken and Soi are not their real names for confidentiality reasons.

I tried to befriend as many business entrepreneurs in the riverine border area as possible. However, as discussed, it was difficult to establish trust in a short period of time. Only seven business entrepreneurs were happy to have conversations with me and sign the consent form. After a few months passed, I decided to ask them for permission for interviews and to explain the academic purpose. Some did not want to be participants because they did not know what ethnography is and its conduct. Obviously, these seven entrepreneurs were happy to help. The interviews were about border-crossings activities, quasi-state checkpoints, and the state officers in the area. This is discussed in the following sections. These seven entrepreneurs show the effects of the introduction of neo-liberal market policies to *Khong Chiam* and *Sanasomboun* on the lives of peoples since 1989. Semi-structured interviews allowed owners of restaurants on the Mekong to give information about the origins of the employees. This origin matters because most of them were undocumented labourers from Lao PDR who crossed the border through the quasi-state checkpoints. According to the regulations of the *Ban Dan Khong Chiam* administration, the crossings at the quasi-state checkpoints allow people from Lao PDR to be in Thai territory approximately from 08.00 to 17.00. Overnight stay is not allowed. However, it is common in the area that undocumented labourers get jobs in business places and stay overnight. There was an ethical issue as not many were happy to discuss this matter with a stranger in a serious manner. This limitation explains why a lot of them declined to sign the consent form and only seven are participants in this thesis. In short, the total number of interviewees is fourteen: seven males and seven females, including a masseuse, waiters, students, housemaid, and fishing boat operator (see Figure 5 on page 77).

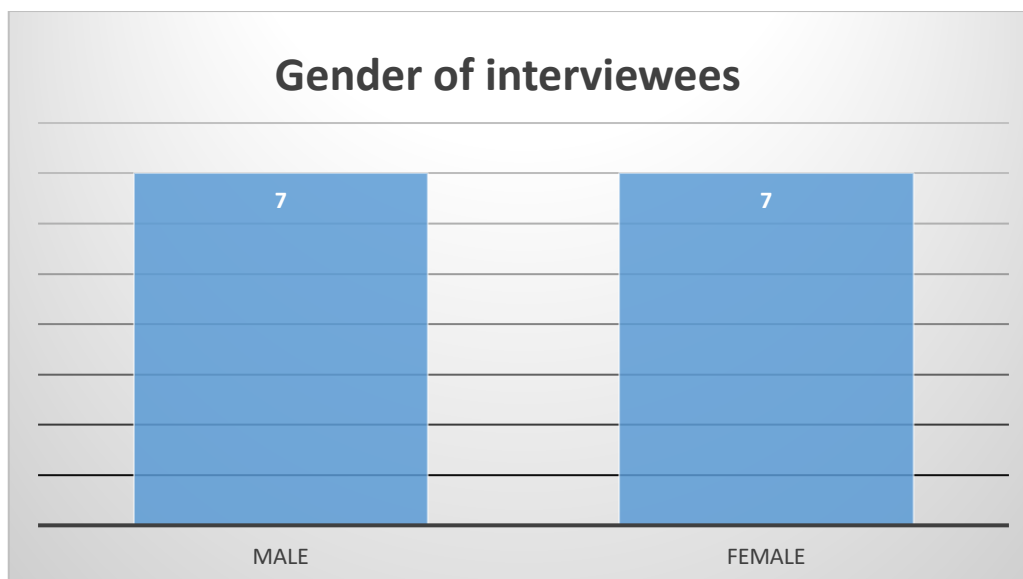


Figure 5

Visits were made to the business entrepreneurs in their restaurants and hotels to interview them. Each interview lasted approximately one hour to two hours. The interview with the coffee shop owners lasted forty minutes. The interviews with the students took place in the school, a place in which they felt comfortable. The housemaid and boat operator were interviewed after dinner at their house as I visited them regularly. The venue of the interview with the male waiter who worked at the five-star hotel was in a coffee shop in *Ban Dan* in which he felt at ease. Finally, the interview with the undocumented waitress from Lao PDR took place during dinner at a private house of a local person where she felt safe.

3.6.4 Ethnography: participant observations, essay readings, interpretations of visual presentations, and interviews

Ethnography is an appropriate choice of methodology for this thesis as it allows me to immerse myself in the field as part of the analysis of the everyday meaning-making practices of the people. This section discusses ethnography and its appropriateness, and the data collection methods of participant observations, interviews, interpretations of visual presentations and essay readings.

Ethnography

The literal meaning of ethnography is “a description of people” and may also refer to a community and/or society, and involves a focus on “shared behaviours, customs, and belief” (Angrosino, 2007, p. 1). Angrosino (2007) said that it is misleading to see ethnography as a homogenised discipline as he named at least eight schools. To look into details of every school is redundant and not the aim of this section.

However, their two common characteristics are worth discussing. First, ethnographers look for patterns of routine in the society studied through observations. They need to balance themselves, epistemologically speaking, so that they do not ignore a generalisation of the topic studied while they have to heed the particular characteristics of that society. Secondly, care must be taken not to harm the people studied. These two ethnographic standpoints are part of my epistemological stance to study the Thai-Lao border at *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*. The Thai-Lao border is a territorial space with the same features as other borders. At the same time, the ways in which people’s political subjectivities play out regarding the unique natural terrain of the border also needs to be analysed.

Ethnographic research demands that a researcher must try to understand people as much as possible. Therefore, the research must be field-based, meaning the researcher must go into the site and get to know the people and community. The researcher needs to have day-to-day and face-to-face interactions with the participants. Furthermore, there must be more than one method applied in the field. Accordingly, I employed three methods of data collection that have ethnographic characteristics: participant observations, interviews, and essay-readings and interpretations of visual presentations.

Methods

a. Participant observations

Participant observations involve seven degrees of collection of information (De Walt & De Walt, 2002). These are pure observation, pure participation, non-participation, passive participation, moderate participation, active participation, and complete participation. Moderate participation, including participating with and interviewing the

peoples, was used in the fieldwork. The research sought to address the ways in which the people live on the border in regard to seasonal changes today. Investigation was also made of the changes that they wanted to improve their lives, the modes in everyday border crossings based on seasonal changes, obstacles they faced when crossing the border, and negotiations to overcome these obstacles.

I observed the setting at the Thai-Lao Mekong riverine border in *Khong Chiam* and *Sanasomboun*. Informal conversations with people helped me get to know the community. Short notes were made of people's activities in my field diary concerning topics of conversation and variations in different occupations' negotiations of economic tasks from dawn to dusk. This process of development of familiarity of the community acted as the introductory phase in the first month after arrival before asking participants become involved.

My participant observations involved the activities of the fishing community, as some levels of trust were required to be built here in the introductory phase. These activities included eating, sleeping-waking patterns, family and community ties, circulation of money and goods, weather (specifically rain), tourists, night-life, and other associated topics. I followed the practices of the fishing village by living and working in the community. For example, in the first phase when I stayed in A. (See Figure 1 on page 67), from March to May 2016, I often ate at the market and restaurants in *Ban Dan Khong Chiam* Municipality. A few times, I was invited to join participants' lunch and dinner at *Ban Tha Phae, Khum Pak Mun*. In early April, I was invited to eat raw fish salad and ants' egg sweet and sour soup (see Picture 5 on page 80). It was interesting that before the end of the dry season in April, the family had a picnic with their neighbours on a Mekong island (*K* in Figure 1 on page 67) and only small fish were caught. From May to July, I observed the waking and sleeping patterns of the fishing community when I moved into their village (*B* in Figure 1 on page 67). They woke up at 5.00 to fish. In the wet season, they stood a chance of catching bigger fish if they get into their boats earlier. I was invited to join the fishing activity in the morning a few times, but I was not invited to join them for breakfast because the family was busy taking their children to school. In the evening, I joined them for dinner on a regular basis. By 21.00, most houses were in darkness. I felt it was too early to sleep so I spent time drinking in the red light district and

encountered some interesting things, such as the prostitution check by military officers in June 2016. This amount of time spent in the red-light district was part of participant observations because I need to establish trust with as many entrepreneurs as possible in the area. One strategy to establish trust was to drink with them. My attempts were not successful as, although some were happy to tell me information about undocumented border-crossings, they did not feel comfortable to sign consent forms.



Picture 5: My first meal with the *Thai Ban* in *Ban Tha Phae*

b. Interviews

I constructed open-ended questions for the interviews, and these were categorised into three groups (see Annexes on page 221). Firstly, questions were asked about the participants' thoughts about the Mekong, its importance to them, and their feelings about the wet and dry seasons and the effects on their lives. The second group contained questions about the participants' knowledge of cross-border

activities that the Thai and Lao states regulate, any important cultural cross-border activities prohibited by the Thai and Lao states, and participants' visits to Lao PDR for business and/or other purposes. The third group consisted of questions focusing on seasonal dynamics related to trade in the wet and dry seasons, effects on markets, and origins of employees.

The interviews involved active and sensitive listening and repetitive feedback. Active listening required me to listen to participants carefully and 'mentally' summarise the details of the persons speaking, the content, and the meanings in the context of the research setting (De Walt & De Walt, 2011). Sensitive listening required a sufficient length of time in the field and rapport with the participants. I let the conversations flow smoothly and maintained eye contact in a non-intimidating manner to show my attention to what was being told. Repetitive feedback involved my repetition of the last words of sentences uttered by the interviewee with a question-tag tonality. This repetition was to imply to the interviewee what interested me. However, it must be noted that in the Lao-Thai language family, there is no question-tag tonality, so the last word is repeated with the question-noun-phrase instead.

The types of questions asked were similar to those proposed by De Walt and De Walt (2011), such as "tell me more," "for clarification," and "naïve question" (De Walt & De Walt, 2011, p.151). The statement "tell me more" is to look for information by simply asking what happens and showing an interest in the topic discussed and keenness to hear more. The statement "for clarification" is to ask for the reasons for informants' thoughts and feelings about certain topics. The "naïve question" is important as it asks a question to which everybody already knows the answer, but more important information may be revealed.

Before the fieldwork in March 2016, I thought I would be able to maintain a distance from such people as the owners of restaurants who may employ persons whose border-crossings are undocumented. However, as the community was small, everyone knew everyone. When I tried to befriend waitresses in a restaurant, as I recognised them as Lao and I assumed their border-crossings were undocumented and they overstayed, it was difficult to keep the owners away. They were always curious about who came to talk to his/her undocumented employees. I tried to speak

to an undocumented 17-year-old Lao waitress by visiting a restaurant often. The owner eventually implied that she had a patron-client relationship with a military general. I suspected that the owner thought I was a representative of the central government sent to detect illegal labourers. This is a common way in which border people show their ties with high-ranked officers so that they are not exploited and bullied by local officers. Eventually, I managed to conduct semi-structured and open-ended interviews with the owner of two restaurants. However, one owner did not allow me to interview the employees. Things were even more difficult at a karaoke bar/restaurant in the red light district. The owners had been involved in trans-border prostitution and agreed to meet. However, they refused to sign consent forms and be subjected to interviews, and cancelled all communication.

c. Essay-readings and visual presentations

Before I went to the field, I expected to receive fifteen essays. However, I received 55 students' essays before I left the field. A total number of approximately 140 male and female high school students aged between 17 and 18 were offered the opportunity to participate in an English Writing course. At first, I expected to see how the space of the Mekong border is interpreted by the younger generation but there were a number of obstacles to this. The obvious obstacle is that the students lacked any incentive to write essays because they were not used to this teaching pedagogy. Eventually, I managed to acquire visual presentations in the forms of Mekong drawings that are used to complement the essay writings.

The English course I offered can be categorised into two groups. Firstly, it was an unofficial course that began in the summer holidays in March 2016 and ended at the end of July 2016. Grade 12 students interested in taking the university entrance attended the class. The nature of English examination at high school level, especially in the provinces, in Thailand is a series of multiple choice questions in which students are supposed to cross what they think is the correct answer to the question. When students came to my class they found it was not what they had expected. Instead, as I taught them to write 100 word essays with such titles as *Mekong*, *Lao PDR*, *Wet Season*, *Dry Season*, and *Tourism in Khong Chiam*. The number of students who turned up to the summer class was 30 but by the last unofficial class,

the number had dwindled to five. During the summer from March to April, I met the students three days per week and the classes lasted two hours per day, free of charge. During the semester, from May to July 2016, I taught the students once a week on Saturdays and the classes lasted two hours per day, free of charge.

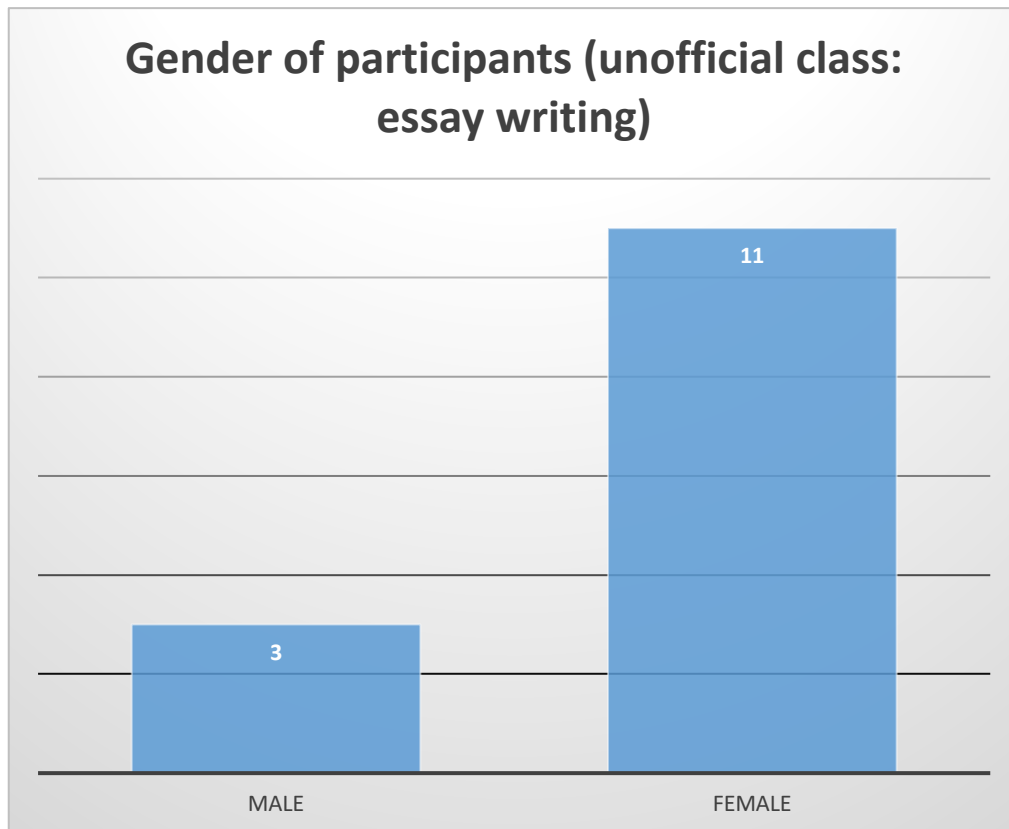


Figure 6

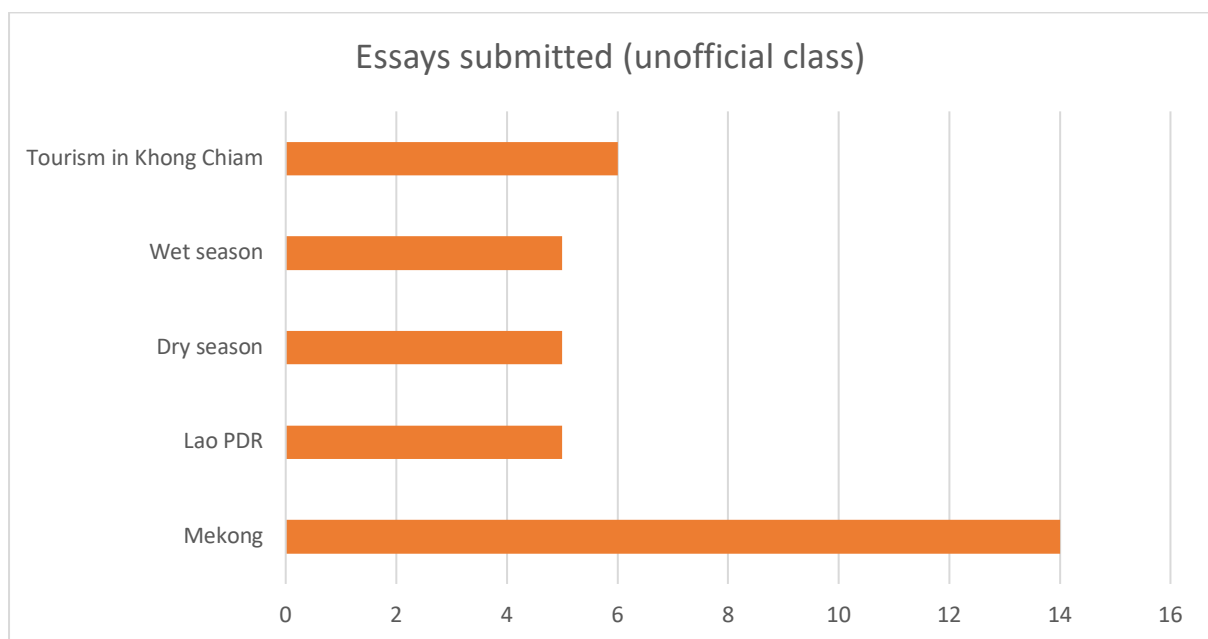


Figure 7

The second type class was official. There were three English Reading and Writing classes for grade 11 students that ran from May to July 2016. I did not use the same essay titles as those in the unofficial class because the chapters in the course assigned by the school were different. Thus, I had to adapt the five topics and changed them to *Sitting on the Boat along the Mekong*, *Tourism in Khong Chiam*, *A Great Escape in Khong Chiam*, *A Long Walk in My Village in the Wet Season*, and *A Long Walk in My Village in the Dry Season*. Each week, the class lasted 150 minutes. In the three classes, 116 students registered. However, only 40 students submitted the essays, consent forms, and parental consent forms (see Figure 7 on page 83).

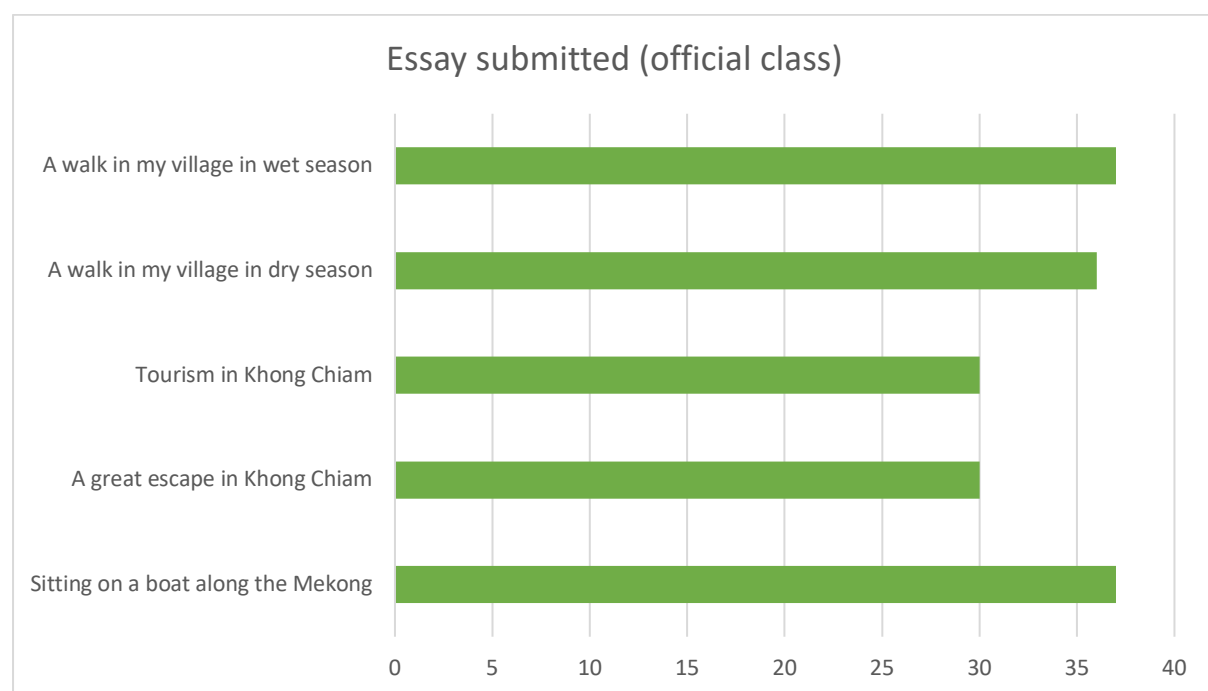


Figure 8

I considered the submission of 55 essays by the students satisfactory. However, there were a number of obstacles in regard to the essays. First, the quality of the English writing is poor. Thai high school students, especially in the border areas, are not used to a teacher who set a writing piece as an assignment as most have been exposed to assessment by multiple choice questions. This affects their level of criticality as well as their writing skills. Also, in the Thai-Lao social context, children

are seldom encouraged to think critically, so their lack of critical thinking and writing skills severely limits their efforts. However, there are some pieces of writing suitable for use as data. Second, there was a lack of an academic atmosphere in the school as students did not feel they needed to study hard to pass the exams as they were annually promoted anyway. More than half of the students did not submit the writings even though they were worth 25% of their grade. For grade 11, the classes were organised according to the school grades that students achieved. The first class was made up of those with the best school reports and most of these students submitted almost all the assignments. The second and third classes did not care about school grades at all. The compulsory education of Thailand is that children aged below 18 must go to school. One administrative staff told me that the school needed to keep these students in the area of the school, even though they did not submit any homework. To go outside the area of the school made them vulnerable to trans-border drug trafficking activities. The staff told me that if I tried to obtain other kinds of data from these groups of students apart from writing, some of them would have been able to produce good work, such as drawings of the Mekong. Eventually, I acquired seven drawings from students. Four were kept in the library at the school. Three were specifically requested by me. The pictures clearly indicated how space was interpreted by the younger generation and these drawings satisfactorily complemented the essay writings.

Another obstacle was that the school schedule was changed arbitrarily. Twice, the school administration ordered the teachers to stop teaching for a couple of days at the time of a visit to the school by a high-ranked bureaucrat from the Ministry of Education in Bangkok. Other non-academic activities regularly caused the cancellation of teaching at least once a month, such as the celebration of Teacher's Day and the practice of military reserve officer training courses. The cultural norm in the Thai-Lao context is that religious ceremonies, authoritarian rituals, encouragement to pay respect to senior and higher ranked state officers are of a high priority compared to academic practices.

In summary, most data were collected from essay-readings. However, due to the students' unfamiliarity with writing assignments, this information provided only basic background of border-crossings in the community. I invited two students for further

interviews - one from the fishing family and another from the Bru speaking village outside *Ban Dan*. Again, similar basic information was acquired²². Data from interviewees such as state officers and entrepreneurs helps clarify certain information in the community. Sometimes, there were certain issues they selected to talk about and other issues they did not want to talk about. Nevertheless, the information from students and interviews of state officers and entrepreneurs helps cross-check features of the atmosphere of the borderland. Interestingly enough, the drawings by the students represent the younger generation's interpretation of space. One of the drawings shows the floating of meaning of the Mekong as a border and as lived space, and this is discussed in the empirical chapters. Moreover, deeper information regarding spatial and temporal negotiations and flexible political subjectivities was acquired by participant observations and interviews of members of the fishing community as I was able to cross-check observations and participation in their daily activities.

3.6.5 Analysis and interpretation

Analysis

Field notes, such as jotted notes, expanded notes, and head notes, were written in English and used to record interviews, everyday activities, and meetings of committees. The jotted notes were about locations in words and/or maps acquired by observations. The expanded notes were analyses of the interviews' jotted notes, involving discussion of the methods used in the interviews. Reflections of the conversations and the next levels of analyses were added. Head notes were used when there were items or events that were not written in full sentences, especially in relation to sensitive topics. These were in the form of personal abbreviations, and they were written up in more detail during private times of reflection.

The process of analysis comprised three steps. Firstly, the research question, *What are the ways in which unofficial modes of border-crossings by the Thai Ban along the Mekong Thai-Lao border are practised in their everyday lives and how can these*

²² Bru is a Mon-Khmer language which refers to an ethnic minority in Lao PDR.

unofficial modes of border-crossing be theorised as a contribution to existing Borderland Studies? is broken into sub-questions. The questions appropriate to essay readings, interpretations of visual presentations, interviews, and observations are grouped. In the observations, temporal analyses such as patterns of everyday routines are detected. Different groups of people observed are recognised as students, male, female, and/or members of the fishing community. Regarding spatial analyses, the everyday activities of the field site are noted. With interviews and in reading students' essays, purposes, frequencies, and modes of people's political subjectivities when they cross the border are identified. Secondly, in the process of analysis, themes are searched for, such as common activities and purposes in border-crossings at the market, night life, school education, and corruption of state officers. Power relations of different groups that interact in cross-border activities are detected regarding who gains and who is involved. The issues of 'who crosses the border', 'direction of crossing', 'the objective of the crossing', 'duration and frequency' and 'state approval of the crossing' are indicated in a table. The information is categorised into two groups; first-hand and second-hand. The category of first-hand indicates the person who gives information actually crosses the border him/herself. At the same time, the second-hand information refers to other persons that the informants hear and witness of their border-crossings. Thirdly, what I learn from these themes is critically stated as they represent the political subjectivities of *Thai Ban* spatial practices on the riverine border as a Third Space. The modes of border-crossing, for example, are analysed according to how people cross the border at the quasi-state checkpoints when the season changes and how they negotiate with state officers and business entrepreneurs on both sides of the river. The contribution to the existing literature of Borderland Studies is eventually to be presented.

Interpretation

a. Languages

Among the participants and their family I spent most of the time with during fieldwork, Lao was the only language spoken. The nuances between standard Lao spoken in Vientiane (the capital city of Lao PDR), Southern Lao PDR, and Lao Isan spoken in North-Eastern Thailand need to be explained. The mentioned participants are fishers

and boat operators and were born in *Pakse* in Southern Lao PDR, and moved to Thailand in the early 2000s. One participant was born in *Bane Sak Mouang, Champassak* in the south of Lao PDR. Hence, they are expected to speak the Southern Lao dialect. Children born and bred in Thailand speak Isan-Lao (slightly different from the Southern Lao dialect) and this is mixed with a lot of Thai vocabulary. Similar accents are heard in the village where the majority of Lao people reside. The language is hybridised. Sometimes, Lao people on the Lao side speak with the same accent as Lao-Isan people. In the fieldwork, I tried hard to speak Lao with a Southern Lao accent but mainly used Isan-Lao and sometimes standard Lao.

However, when I wrote my field diary, English was chosen because I did not want villagers to be able to understand what was written. The reason for this was to protect some participants that may have had a secret they did not want others to know. It was not a case of villagers taking my diary and reading it, but I was afraid that the diary may be seen or possibly stolen. Thus, using English was a way to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

In the fourteen interviews, Thai, Lao, Isan-Lao, French, and English were spoken. English was employed in the interview with the owner of the five-star-hotel although this person is Thai and educated to a master degree level in the US. Therefore, the interview was easily transcribed as recorded. With another business entrepreneur who was French and married to a Thai, I tried to speak French to him so that trust could be easily established. However, as my French skill was at the elementary level (I was an exchange student for one year to Belgium in 1998) the conversation was not deep, so I asked him to be interviewed in English instead. Two other business entrepreneurs who were also bureaucrats were happy to be interviewed in Thai, and the two coffee shop owners and one garage owner were similarly happy to be interviewed in Thai. One student who spoke Thai fluently gave an interview to me in Thai. Another student from a Bru village struggled to speak Thai and sometimes questions were answered in Lao-Isan. The masseuse was happy to talk to me in Thai but sometimes she could not help swearing in Lao-Isan as it was the language spoken daily. Only in the interview with the husband and wife from *Ban Tha Phae, Khum Pak Mun* was Lao spoken throughout.

As I have a Bachelor of Arts (English) and master degree in Translation (English-Thai) from Chulalongkorn University, I consider myself a competent translator so I translated all the interviews from Lao and Thai to English. The translation would be better if reviewed by an English native speaker.

b. Essay-readings and visual presentations

As students were not used to education in which the practice of writing was the norm, I encouraged them to think of the world around and express their feelings. The writing task of each topic was thus divided into three phases. First, for example, regarding the topic of the *Mekong*, I encouraged them to express the different meanings of the Mekong as members of the younger generation – on the one hand as a territory and on the other as a lived space. I assigned the students to write ten sentences about their thoughts of the *Mekong* in Thai. Once they submitted, I considered the Thai vocabulary they used to describe the Mekong then I wrote them the English translations of the Thai words they wrote. It was hoped that these English words contextually fitted with the meanings the students wanted to express. However, in that stage, the English words I wrote were not yet arranged into an English semantic order. I then returned the assignment to the students. The second phase was that I asked the student to weave the English translation of the Thai words that were not semantically arranged into a proper English sentence, telling them that it could express what they wanted to say in Thai. Once they submitted, I marked the essay, corrected them, and returned the assignments to the students. The third phase was that the students re-wrote their essays and submitted the clean versions.

Many students found it hard to express their ideas, even in Thai, so they consulted with me at my working desk in the library. Most also found it hard to write a proper English sentence though they started learning English at the age of five. The worst case I encountered was a Grade 11 student did know the meanings of the words 'black' and 'white.' Another did not know that an upper case letter in English functions differently from a lower case and there needed to be a full-stop at the end of a sentence. Consequently, these two students did not want to participate in the research. Methodologically, the fact that a lot of students were not able to express

their ideas in a written language was a drawback of this method. This was because the essay-reading was only able to express what a literally qualified student perceived of the world while those deemed literally unqualified were ruled out. Ethically, the fact that I introduced this style of teaching may have caused some emotional harm to some students as they were not used to this way of teaching style. No teacher at this school had introduced the teaching of writing exercises before. The fact that they were unable to do the same as a standard student of their age in other parts of the country may have made them feel bad about themselves. Therefore, I tried to find a solution that instead of asking the students to do something they were not good at and causing embarrassment, I asked them to complete something they were good at, such as drawing. Indeed, many were proud of their drawings of the Mekong and I decided not to maintain the anonymity of the artist, as shown in the empirical chapter on spatial negotiations.

3.6.6 Critical reflection on positionality, and ethical and methodological challenges

My positionality

I am of Thai-Lao ethnicity from the upper-middle social class and was born approximately 80 kilometres from the site of the study. The participants living on the border may be viewed as marginalised and internally colonised by the Thai state in the time of modernisation (Winichakul, 1994), as the border is an area remote from the centre of the state. The use of ethnography at the border zone of the Thai and Lao states sheds light on the everyday practices of these marginalised peoples, similar to the research of Passaro (1997). Gupta and Ferguson (1997, p. 36) stated that one of the requirements for ethnographic research was the “shifting geographical location.” Despite a number of visits as a tourist to *Khong Chiam*, the everyday practices of riverine communities were not familiar to me before I completed the six-month fieldwork. Thus, to collect data on the riverine border represents a significant shift of geographical location for me, despite its location in my own country.

My first language is Thai and I am fluent in the Lao language used in the focus area of the study, so there was little problem with languages. The main difference between the participants and me was one of social class that led to some initial difficulties. I am from a family with a military background and the army is active along the border, though my father retired six years before the fieldwork in 2016. In the fieldwork from March to August that year, the fact that I have a military background caused some problems for the border people as some of them were unsure of my intentions, especially with the current political situation in Thailand under the Junta.

I tried to clearly communicate the objectives of the research to all participants. Still, due to the different education and social status backgrounds, they found it difficult to understand what a researcher was. For example, I clarified my role in that I was not a teacher but a researcher collecting data related to cross-border activities as part of the completion of a doctoral thesis at Loughborough University. Many did not embrace the idea of me being a researcher. This was because a teacher was an occupation the community was familiar with, but a researcher was something new to the *Thai Ban*. As a result, confusion and misunderstandings occurred at times.

A number of villagers who had their working-patterns during the day-time believed I was a teacher. This belief caused some difficulty when I conducted participant observations at night around the red-light district. A good teacher was not expected to visit brothels. As I was to collect data in fieldwork, there were times that I needed to visit such places. I felt it was inappropriate to stay at the karaoke past midnight, however. The fact that I visited the karaoke and left at 22.00 made the owners even more suspicious, because customers normally leave after midnight. Both owners of the two karaoke-restaurants doubted whether I was really a teacher. They thought I was a spy sent by the central government. Partly, it was because of the ring I wore that represented my father's cadet school. They kept asking, after seeing the ring, whether I was a military officer. This suspicion caused their reluctance to participate in the interviews and sign consent forms.

That I have a military background caused a dilemma during the fieldwork. My father was the deputy commander in chief of the royal Thai army and the guard of the Queen of Thailand before he retired in 2011. A number of military officers throughout

the Thai-Lao border still respected him. Upon arrival, I decided not to declare any familial ties with military officers because I was afraid it would affect the data acquisition. However, there were three times that I had to use such military ties to ensure my safety in the field. The first time was when the police came to check soon after I arrived at *Ban Tha Phae, Khum Pak Mun* in May 2016. I was cautioned by the *Thai Ban* that the police could organise something to arrest me by placing drugs in my hands and taking me to jail. Therefore, I asked my father's military staff to inform the police officer of my doctoral project. I insisted that the military officers kept it a secret, and no other military officers knew this. In June 2016, the military officers outside the area came to check human trafficking in a karaoke bar (*E* in Figure 1 on page 67). All customers ran away after the military arrived but I sat there, trying to console the owner, and observed how the female employees were checked. After that night, a group of military officers came to ask the owner of the karaoke bar who I was. Again, I had to use the familial tie to inform them of my academic objective. Third, at the end of June 2016, I received a threat from someone accused of drug trafficking by a number of villagers. It was suggested by my supervisors at Loughborough University, after a communication via e-mail, that I should report this to the police. However, in my opinion, this is unrealistic because that person who threatened me worked in a restaurant (*G* in Figure 1 on page 67) accused of monthly bribing the police. I thus had to rely on the typical ways of the *Thai Ban* by claiming a close tie with high-ranked state officers in the area to guarantee my safety. In short, my military background was a drawback that it made prospective participants suspicious of my intentions. At the same time, the military tie was also positive that it guaranteed my survival in the Thai-Lao border context. Luckily, by the time I revealed my military background, trust was strongly built with people in the fishing community. They were happy to participate in my research and signed consent forms. Only those from the red-light district remained suspicious of my intentions.

On the Lao side, there was a time when I was checked by a Lao officer. Before that I visited *L* (See Figure 1 on page 67) *Bane May Singsampahne* in Lao PDR on a weekly basis accompanied by my participants to normally drink whiskey at the house of a Lao military officer. With a local walking with me, no Lao officers came to bother. However, when I tried to visit the village alone to see what would happen, pretending to make merit at a Buddhist temple, I was stopped by a Lao officer upon returning to

the Thai side. He asked me who I was, what I did for a living, and he took notes. At first, I thought of being honest, and telling him that I was a doctoral student at Loughborough University. However, I changed my mind, realising that telling this was too complicated and strange information was too risky. Therefore, I told him I was a teacher at the school on the other side of the river as he could see it from the chair in which he was sitting. I said that I visited the village to make merit as it was the Buddhist Holy Day. Then he let me go. That day's event was another reconfirmation that, without a local or a high-ranked officer, approaches were made to me by officers of both territorial states.

Ethics

I received ethical approval from Loughborough University and the relevant Thai government organisations in March 2016. I was aware that I was required to ask participants to sign consent forms and parental consent forms due to ethical issues.

After spending a week observing the daily routines of the riverine communities along the Thai-Lao riverine border, I began to talk to prospective informants after introductions by the gatekeeper. For adult participants, it was not easy to talk about the project in the first month because, as mentioned, they found it hard to understand what a researcher was. To give them overwhelming information at one time would have made them bored and reluctant to talk to me. As a result, the plan to hand them Participant Information Sheets and details of the study in the first month of the arrival was postponed. However, I gave them the documents after a couple of months.

The host school issued a letter of approval that I taught an English writing class at the school from March to August 2016. I therefore handed the documents about the information of the research to children and parents at the beginning to the parents and the students meeting in the first month of arrival. Students were then given the Children Consent Forms and Parental Consent Forms to be signed before participation in the research. Despite the fact that I handed the Consent Forms and Parental Consent Forms to participants, I was always aware that to conduct ethnographic research, participants should not be physically and emotionally

harmed, as indicated by Davies (1999), and De Walt and De Walt (2011). At school, students were my major participants and it was not likely that they would be physically harmed. Still, it was risky that they were emotionally harmed although I tried to contribute to the community by offering English classes. Not every student wanted to learn English according to my style which mainly involved writing. The different pedagogy may have harmed the students emotionally because they may have felt bad about their inability to write. For other participants outside the school, I was also aware that those involved with undocumented border-crossings felt uncomfortable to reveal their everyday lives. I did not force them to say anything unless they were happy to, as one code of conduct of ethnography is that the researcher should not force participants to do anything they do not want to (Davies, 1999). At last, trust was built with a number of participants. My major participants in the fishing community were happy to do so as I was so close to them during the fieldwork.

I informed participants that they had the right to withdraw from the research in the consent forms and verbally if participants are illiterate. However, the withdrawal must happen before the thesis submission at the beginning of 2018. They were informed that data were anonymous according to the standard of social sciences norms. Contextual information has been kept to identify more prominent participants, if considered necessary. The data have been stored safely and without access by third parties on my external drive.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have proposed the study of pluralities of the border-crossings at *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* as an epistemological stance that people's mobility co-exists with the sedentary norm in the form of a Westphalian territorial border. I have proposed that the centripetal approach is used to analyse the borderlands as the focus because it is able to shed light on the pluralities of people's mobility in the area. As the borderland is proposed to be not only the meeting point of the two states but also the Third Space where the territorial border is drawn, it has its own condition. The notion of everyday practices is also used to analyse the condition in

relations to the *Thai Ban*'s modes of crossing the border. With the unique natural terrain, I have proposed in this thesis to employ the notion of riverscape that constitutes the formulation of people's political subjectivities when they cross the border.

Ethnography is an appropriate methodology that answers the research question. This chapter further discusses the methodological approach and research techniques adopted to investigate Thai-Lao people who cross the Mekong River border as part of their everyday lives. Prolonged engagement and participant observations in the field combined with open-ended and semi-structured interviews, interpretations of visual presentations, and essay-readings proved to be effective research tools to gather a wide range of information on the research topic. Embracing an ethnographic interpretative perspective in the sampling of participants, in the interview process, in the transcription/translation of interview material, and in the analysis of the interpretations of the data allows self-reflexivity and the acknowledgement of both the merits and limitations of the research methods. Clarifying my bias and ethical concerns is also fundamental to ensure the accuracy and accountability of the findings. The fieldwork research was designed to shed light on the political subjectivities of the *Thai Ban*'s mode of border-crossing attached to the seasonal changes on the river border. The production of knowledge is aimed to support the epistemological stance of this thesis that people's movements should be perceived as normal, especially when their movements cut across the state boundary that the central governments expects to control the people.

Chapter 4 - Spatial negotiations: State space and lived space of the *Thai Ban*

4.1. Introduction

The assumption of a sedentary world developed with the concept of modern nation-states as a means of controlling space and people. However, people are not always passive and accepting of expectations of this sedentary idea. People's mobility interacts with a boundary and the two co-exist. In this chapter, I argue that pluralities in border-crossings occur as the people who make crossings, especially the *Thai Ban* in their everyday lives, subvert, reject, ignore, and embrace the logic of the national border. These pluralities can be observed despite the prevalence of the sedentary assumption in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*.

The most prominent interstate policy on the Thai-Lao border is the ASEAN Masterplan (2016) that aims to promote people's movements and increase contact among state-members in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) that began in 2015. However, the campaign relies on the assumption that territorial boundaries exist first, and people's mobility is permitted only through certain channels, such as formal border checkpoints. These policies of the Thai and Lao governments have constantly reproduced the sedentary norm. This example can especially be seen in the fieldwork at the superficial level. The most famous temple in the community constructed a giant gong decorated with the ten flags of the ASEAN nations²³ (see Picture 6 on page 109). However, seldom did I hear the *Thai Ban* adults talk about ASEAN in the field. Even though the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs contributed to the construction of the ASEAN Library at *Khong Chiam Witthayakom School* in 2016, most students did not know much or did not care about the details of the national members of ASEAN, except those students with with best school reports.

²³ In Buddhist temples, a gong is a metal disc to be hit and to give a sound to tell the time to the village. However, in *Khong Chiam*, there was a giant gong used to promote the AEC campaign and it became a tourist attraction.

Despite the policy to promote connectivity, the sedentary norm was still present in my fieldwork on the Thai-Lao border. Formal checkpoints and quasi-state checkpoints were still in operation to check border-crossings between the two nation-states. Accordingly, more nuance practices of sedentarism need to be explained. Therefore, this chapter shows that the prominent assumption practised at formal checkpoints is not the only form of spatial practice in the borderland. Throughout the 1,810 kilometres of the Thai-Lao border, most people in border provinces resort to quasi-state checkpoints established by the central governments of Vientiane (Lao PDR) and Bangkok (Thailand) to allow local administrations in border provinces to organise crossing regulations (Pongern, 1988; Rungmanee, 2014). I argue that there are other modes of border-crossings that do not simply conform or totally reject the sedentary norm practised at formal checkpoints. The formal checkpoint at *Chong Mek-Phonethong*, for example, located approximately 30 kilometres from the focus area of my research, represents the more dominant state-centric assumption that the flow of the people has to be controlled and permitted to make crossings.²⁴ The quasi-state checkpoints in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* similarly represent the sedentary norm but the regulations are more loosely practised. Meanwhile, *Thai Ban*, people who rely mainly on subsistence economy along the Mekong River, can make crossings in their everyday lives without having to resort to the two modes of the state-centric and quasi-state checkpoints. While the Thai and Lao states employ the Mekong as the territorial divide, the *Thai Ban* often interpret it as a lived space. Other possibly meanings also emerge endlessly, such as the Mekong being perceived as the space for spiritual belongingness because the mythological serpent god Naga is believed to reside there. I argue that the interpretations of the Mekong float back and forth, resulting in the spatial negotiations of this in-between space that is the Third Space of the borderland.

The assumption that states' spaces are separated still continues despite an increasingly globalised world in which cross-border interactions have become more common, leading to claims of a borderless world (Ohmae, 1996). A number of areas

²⁴ The information provided by Google Map indicates that the location is 26.1 kilometres from the formal checkpoint.

are becoming increasingly bordered, such as tighter restrictions between Mexico and the US and the EU and non-EU countries²⁵. With such a sedentary assumption, people are fixed to given territories and delimited by state boundaries, and crossing requires the approval of the state. Even among the EU members where their citizens can travel freely within the territories of the members, crossing the border for a number of non-EU citizens is still difficult (Migglebrink, 2014; Oelgemoller, 2012). Ludden (2003, p. 1070) accordingly called for the urgent need to critique the fact that people's mobility is "secondary" to state boundaries, and proposed that, to understand the world of mobility better, "intersections of mobility and territorialism" should be the focus of analysis. Cunningham and Heyman (2004) touched on the interaction of people's mobility with states' territories and proposed that there are pluralities in border-crossings, indicating that people not only conform to the existence of states' territories but subvert them. Pluralities can be observed in the work of Cunningham and Heyman (2004) that found that people who are not allowed to cross borders eventually find ways to cross them by avoiding surveillance and police. Cunningham and Heyman (2004) used the term enclosure when people's flow is controlled and argued that this very enclosure is not practised at all places and all times along borders. In my thesis, I shed light on these pluralities by showing how enclosure is practised at formal checkpoints and loosely practised in a different mode such as at quasi-state checkpoints. I argue that as part of the in-between nature of the Third Space, the people's flow management in the form of quasi-state checkpoints, the police at non-checkpoints and the endless spatial negotiations of people's mobility are important in the discussion.

Investigation of pluralities of crossings in the borderland is important because the examination by this chapter of the spatial negotiations in the borderland acts as the centre of analysis. By taking this approach, I am able to look at the in-between nature of the Third Space, and consider the borderlands as "entities in their own rights" (Goodhand, 2008, p. 226). Accordingly, the management of space and people who make crossings in the borderland is analysed. The features of the border-

²⁵ There are a number of researchers who focus on the borderlands of US and Mexico and EU and non-EU zones. It is impossible to name them all but some can be mentioned here. Those who focus on the US-Mexican border are Anzaldúa (1987), Cunningham and Heyman (2004), Ackleson (1999, 2011), and Nail (2013). Those who focus on EU and non-EU borders are Balibar (1998), Vaughan-Williams (2009), Mezzadra and Neilson (2013), Topak (2014) and Leese (2016).

crossing situations in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* and the pluralities of border-crossings in the area are evidence that the practice of sedentary assumption co-exists with people's mobility in their everyday lives. Combining the topographical approach focusing on space in tandem with the topological one that focuses on people's mobility, I aim to contribute to the existing literature in Border Studies and Borderland Studies in two ways. First, in this chapter, I show the floating of meaning of the interpretations of the Mekong River in people's everyday practices. On the one hand, the Mekong is taken as a space to catch food and use for transport among villages. On the other hand, it represents the line that divides two state spaces. These interpretations float and shape each other. Second, the floating of meaning in everyday practices endlessly contributes to the pluralities of the border-crossings as the *Thai Ban* as political actors can interpret the river in both ways, depending on the context and whom they encounter.

To examine the pluralities of the ways in which people, especially the *Thai Ban*, make border-crossings, I discuss the first sub-research question of this thesis, *How do different actors in Khong Chiam and Sanasomboun spatially interpret and negotiate the Thai-Lao Mekong riverine border?* The first sub-research question is further divided into three questions. The first asks, *What are the ways in which the national boundary has shaped the everyday lives of the people according to a sedentary assumption that results in the people's choice of mode of border-crossing?* The second section discusses another interpretation as the Mekong is used by the *Thai Ban* as a space of life asking, *What are the ways in which the Thai-Lao Mekong border is interpreted by the Thai Ban as a life space and employ it as a mode of border-crossing?* The third section displays the core argument of this chapter which is about spatial negotiations at quasi-state checkpoints and non-checkpoints that reveals the in-between nature of the Third Space asking, *What are the ways in which the everyday pluralities of border-crossings at Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun take place and are negotiated at the quasi-state checkpoints?*

To understand on the pluralities of border-crossings, the discussion in this chapter is divided into three steps. The first examines the official mode of border-crossing that occurs through the checkpoint at *Chong Mek-Phonthong* which is a land border located around 30 kilometres from the location of the fieldwork. I employ the notion

of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1995) and biopolitics (Foucault, 2008) to examine the way in which the flow of the people is managed and becomes the subject of surveillance by equipment such as sensors for national ID cards and CCTV. I argue that the sedentary norm is still practised at such formal checkpoints. The fact that this kind of checkpoint is not located along the whole length of the Thai-Lao border is both politically and economically costly to people who live far away, resulting in them hesitating to cross the border through this junction. Accordingly, I discuss my own experience as someone who has crossed the border through the formal checkpoints often and compare my experience with my *Thai Ban* participant. The comparison helps explain why the *Thai Ban*, as one example of many, feel more comfortable making crossings at quasi-state checkpoints than at the formal ones. The second section examines the fact that the *Thai Ban* in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* area interpret the Mekong as a lived space and cross the border with little disruption by the logic and practice of sedentary assumption to their everyday practices. Many of the border-crossings are made by locals who live in the area, own their own boat, or know someone with their own boat, and therefore are able to make crossings. They cross the border anywhere anytime between the riverine villages regardless of the nation-state. The notion of everyday life (De Certeau, 1988; Lefebvre, 1971, 2002) is employed in the riverine border villages to stress that the natural terrain of the border is important in people's mobility (Sankhamanee, 2009). Thirdly, I examine the interplay between the two major interpretations of the Mekong as a territorial border on the one hand and lived space on the other when border-crossings are made at quasi-state checkpoints run by the local administrations of *Ban Dan Khong Chiam* and *Bane Maysingsamphane*. These two major interpretations lead to other different interpretation assigned to the Mekong when border-crossings are made. While a checkpoint exists on the Thai side to welcome border-crossings from Lao territory through one checkpoint, people from the Thai side are able to cross the river border to the Lao side via two checkpoints for departure and one for arrival in Lao territory. The fact that the local administrations have been granted the authority to practise loose regulations for border-crossings indicates that the centre of the state recognises that it is impossible to control mobility in borderlands at all places and all times. The sedentary assumption does not completely disappear but people's mobility is not strictly controlled through these quasi-state checkpoints either. Spatial negotiations, therefore, when border-crossings are made, can be witnessed. I argue

that this floating of spatial interpretations and practices contributes to the nature of various meanings assigned to the river border that results in pluralities in the borderland as a Third Space.

4.2 Sedentary assumption of the state: Disciplinary power and biopolitics of border-crossings

This section begins with a brief examination of the assumed sedentary norm widely accepted by state practitioners and academia described by Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) as '*fabrica mundi*.' In chapters 2 and 3, it was explained that this sedentary norm was introduced throughout the world during colonial days in the form of Westphalian borders. In this section, I analyse the hegemonic nature of the Thai-Lao boundary as a hard line in various forms of border checkpoints in the area adjacent to my fieldwork site. As the sedentary norm cannot be put into practice throughout the whole length of the border, a formal checkpoint where the sedentary norm is prominent is the focus of this section. The analysis of this formal checkpoint is in line with the argument of Cunningham and Heyman (2004, p. 295) that the "enclosure" of state space that slows down the flow of people is practised at certain points of the boundary. The formal checkpoint is an example of such an enclosure. Accordingly, this section applies the notion of disciplinary power and biopolitical practice of Foucault (1995, 2008). The cross-border activities at the formal checkpoint at *Chong Mek-Phonethong* are analysed to provide background for further analysis of the everyday border-crossings at quasi-state checkpoints in the following sections. The local *Thai Ban* of *Khong Chiam-Sanasamboun* (see Picture 4 on page 12) do not very often use the formal channel unless necessary but instead use the quasi-state checkpoints because to travel to *Chong Mek* is financially and politically costly. In this section, I analyse the queuing of border-crossers at the formal Thai-Lao border checkpoint for verification of their personal identities and surveillance by CCTV and how citizens of both two states conform to the regulations as the crossings are made.

4.2.1 Sedentary assumption on the Thai-Lao border

The sedentary norm in the form of Westphalian state was passed on from Europe in the colonisation process. It took several decades for locals to gradually embrace the practice of a Westphalian space, such as the Siamese elites in the late 19th century when they encountered the French colonialists (Winichakul, 1994). The Siamese-French Indochina boundary was drawn in 1893 as the first legal mechanism that put the Westphalian norm into practice, but it was not until the 1926 Siamese-French Treaty started to recognise the flexibility of the people who crossed the border everyday when they fished the Mekong River. Indeed, if the practice was implemented, the people on both banks of the river who fished in their everyday lives would be affected as the river became the territory that supposedly separated two sovereign spaces (Siam on the one hand and France on the other). Article 7 in the 1926 Siamese-French Treaty later recognised the everyday lives of the people on both banks of the river saying that, “The nationals of both countries shall be entitled to fish over the whole breadth of the river, provided they employ only floating or hand tackle” (Kasetsiri, 2011, p. 144). Data collected in the field indicated that the *Thai Ban* from both banks now fish anywhere in the river as long as they do not use permanently-erected equipment. Ken, 40, a Thai citizen who used to have dual Thai and Lao citizenship, lives in this borderland of *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* as a fisherman and sometimes as a boat operator for tourists who want to explore the Mekong River²⁶. In his everyday life, he fishes with a portable net and rod on the islands, as any permanently set up equipment means that he must respect the thalweg, which acts as the state boundary. Border-crossings over the river are everyday activities for Ken.

In colonial days, the Siamese-French Indochina border was drawn to supposedly separate groups of Lao speakers (Breazeale, 1975; Winichakul, 1994). Despite being separated by a national boundary, the people continued their everyday family and cultural ties. The 1926 Treaty began to recognise the people’s everyday practices of crossing the river and was aware that strict territorial rules could not be upheld. Some flexibility was then allowed, such as people being able to fish the river with non-permanent fishing equipment. Movement over the river was common and later permitted. However, these permitted movements had to conform to conditions

²⁶ Ken is a pseudonym. More information about the participant is given in Chapter 3.

set by the states regarding the national boundary. I argue that the practice of the sedentary assumption is problematic because the state is unable to put the norm into practice along the whole length of the Thai-Lao border all the time. The border checkpoints are the only spots where people are judged by the state regarding their rights to cross the border. In the riverine area of non-checkpoints, the locals are confined by the conditions set in the treaty based on this sedentary assumption that only fishers with non-permanent fishing equipment are allowed to cross.

Crossing at the official checkpoint at *Chong Mek-Phonethong* is advantageous for those with passports as they are allowed to stay in the host state for up to 30 days. However, non-passport holders are only allowed to stay for three days and two nights, according to the 1997 Agreements on crossings between Thailand and Lao PDR. Persons are officially allowed to make crossings from 06.00 to 20.00 every day. These times are set by the Thai and Lao states so that border-crossers can make a legal entry or departure, and state officers are able to check, collect fees, and record people's mobility. Modern equipment, such as scanning machines for the detection of weapons, computers to record personal ID cards, and CCTV, operate at the *Chong Mek-Phonethong* formal checkpoint. I crossed the border through this checkpoint twice – once with my participant during the fieldwork on trips to *Pakse*, Lao PDR and once to *Pakse* alone because my participant was unable to attend. I had no problem being observed by CCTV and my ID card was verified upon crossing. The example of my experience to make a crossing through this formal checkpoint can be compared with Ken's. I crossed the border through the formal checkpoint with him once as he went to visit his relatives in Lao PDR and invited me to join him. I thought it was a good way to establish trust with this participant as few *Thai Ban* were willing to talk to a stranger about sensitive issues about undocumented border crossings. I agreed to go with him to visit his birthplace. At the checkpoint, I felt comfortable when I made the crossing because I had previously been through the biopolitical border practices, in the terminology of Vaughan-Williams (2009), many times in many parts of the world. Ken, on the other hand, obviously felt uncomfortable as he did a number of things wrong when handing in the formal documents and had to walk back and forth among different buildings of the Thai and Lao officers. This may be the reason why Ken was more comfortable making crossings at the quasi-state checkpoints.

4.2.2 Biopolitics of border-crossings at the formal checkpoint

Biopolitics refers to “the administration of the bodies and calculated management of life” (Foucault, 1998, p. 140). In ancient times, biopolitics was concerned with how to “*faire vivre*,” meaning how the state supports the living of the citizens, and “*laissez mourir*,” meaning how the state takes lives from the citizens (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, 2010; Rabinow & Rose, 2006). To live or die thus depends on the judgement of the sovereign. However, regarding border-crossings in the modern days, biopolitics can be applied with people’s circulation and movement in regard to the separation of a good population from a bad one. At border checkpoints, this denotes those who are allowed to make crossings are considered as good and allowed to leave the home state and enter another state. To make this judgement, personal information needs to be checked and possessions inspected.

At *Chong Mek-Phonethong*, the state controls space in terms of the direction of the flow of people. For me, as a Thai citizen, crossing at *Chong Mek-Phonethong* posed no problem. By the application of the concept of biopolitics of Foucault, I conformed to the state’s regulations on border-crossings. In borderlands, biopolitics may also refer to the state practice to direct the flow of people to a particular channel and identity records. When related to the administration of the flow at the border, it also involves the security of the state. Foucault (2009, p. 20) explained:

I think we can speak here of a technique that is basically organized by reference to the problem of security, that is to say, at bottom, to the problem of the series. An indefinite series of mobile elements: circulation, x number of carts, x number of passers-by, x number of thieves, x number of miasmas, and so on. An indefinite series of events that will occur: so many boats will berth, so many carts will arrive, and so on. And equally an indefinite series of accumulating units: how many inhabitants, how many houses, and so on. I think the management of these series that, because they are open series can only be controlled by an estimate of probabilities, is pretty much the essential characteristic of the mechanism of security.

This quote illustrates the practices of biopolitics and disciplinary power in regard to the flow of the people over the Thai-Lao border that I witnessed during the fieldwork. For example, Ken made his routine crossing of the border at *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* and was allowed to stay in Lao PDR as the host state in a limited area and for a limited duration. If he wanted to go further and stay longer in Lao PDR, and did not wish to be perceived as a threat to the security of Lao PDR, he was required to travel around 30 kilometres to the formal checkpoint at *Chong Mek-Phonethong*. To cross at the formal checkpoint was not an everyday occurrence for Ken. At the same time, while making the crossing, I observed Ken's discomfort as he went through all the procedures of payment and registration for his departure from Thailand. We had our ID cards registered, paid the thirty baht departure fee, and had our border passes stamped and the 13 numbers of our ID cards of Thai citizenship registered upon crossing in the computerised system on the Thai side. This was biopolitics in practice because the flow, according to the terminology of Nail (2016), was directed to the junction of the bridge that separated two national spaces. The disciplinary power was similar because I was a docile body in the terminology of Foucault, allowing the Thai officers to watch me cross the border and look through my personal belongings and at my personal information indicated on my ID card. In the terminology of Rabinow and Rose (2006), Ken and I were subjected to the normalised practices that the state expects of people when they make crossings. The surveillance techniques and equipment were applied to ensure that the people moved accordingly through this channel. Our personal information as "mobile elements," according to Foucault (2009, p. 20), were recorded so that our flows were managed and once we were permitted to make crossings, we were not perceived as a threat to the state which we were entering.

To further ensure that we were not threats while crossing the border, our personal bags were directed through a baggage carousel with an x-ray machine to detect metal that could be used as weapons. I observed that there were CCTV cameras along the way out of the checkpoint on the Thai side. Conceptually speaking, biopolitics is the control of the flow of the "bodies" (Foucault, 2003, p. 249) by such factors as surveillance. I agree with Foucault that the state still has the "right to eliminate, or the right to disqualify" citizens and non-citizens (2003, p. 261). The state monopolises the right to watch people who make crossings and where the

crossings should be made. Therefore, this exercise of biopolitics of the state may be noted at formal border-crossings where citizens and non-citizens move in and out of states. Similar to other borders in other parts of the world, CCTV and computerised systems are in operation when people make crossings. This argument about surveillance by Foucault (2003) was supported as we continued our crossing through an underground tunnel that led us to an exit in Lao territory into a fenced area that separated us from Thailand, all accompanied by CCTV cameras. The prescribed course through the tunnel was part of the biopolitical process that involved the treatment of new arrivals by the state as if we were some kinds of species and our movements need to be controlled. Ken and I were treated as moving bodies directed through a designated channel. After a walk of a few metres, we arrived at the customs building in Lao territory, paid our 100 baht fees, and entered Lao PDR.

The Foucauldian analysis by the application of the concept of biopolitics and disciplinary power with the flow of people over borders has been conducted by a number of scholars in Border Studies and Borderland Studies. In Chapter 2, I mentioned the study of the US-Mexican border conducted by Nail (2013). While some researchers' works have relevance to my research, the work of Nail is especially appropriate to this formal checkpoint in my field site for two reasons. First, the US-Mexican border represents the use of modern technology applied to direct and complete the surveillance of the flow of people similar to my case study at *Chong Mek-Phonethong*, except for the absence of military equipment and drones (Jones & Johnson, 2016). These two formal checkpoints, one on the US-Mexico border and the other on the Thai-Lao border, represent the main focus of most current literature and justify my attempt to address people's mobility at other types of border-crossing. The analysis of formal checkpoints can be used as background to explain the decisions of the *Thai Ban* in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* not to always use formal channels when making their everyday border-crossings.

4.3 The *Thai Ban*'s routine: Thai-Lao Mekong border as a life space

In this section, I present another situation in which people make border-crossings with little intervention by state officers and the sedentary assumption of either Thailand or Lao PDR. The section discusses similar situations in the literature of Borderland Studies by proposing that the natural terrain of a border forms part of people's everyday mobility. To supplement the previous section's examination of the rigid spatial control by the state at formal checkpoints, this section sheds light on other situations involving people's mobility to act as a springboard to the analysis of pluralities of border-crossings in which people reject, embrace, and subvert the existence of national territory.

Accordingly, I show that the people in the borderlands do not perceive the natural terrain simply as a boundary but very often as a space of life. The movements of the people, especially the *Thai Ban*, are not interpreted as crossings of international borders when they engage in this space in their everyday lives. In my fieldwork, the dynamics of the Mekong changes depending on the seasons, and this contributes to the everyday mobility of the *Thai Ban* in their communications with villages across the river, regardless of them being in a different nation-state. When the Mekong is employed as a space of life, the interpretation of it as an international border is sometimes suspended. As a result, people using the Mekong are not policed, nor are they required to go through the formal checkpoint located some kilometres away. Theoretically, the flow of people does not have to go through the junction formally set up by the state that assumed the sedentary norm as its spatial practice.

In Borderland Studies, a number of scholars considered the natural dynamics of border terrain and the shaping of people's mobility by the natural landscape. Madsen (2014) studied the crossings of Native Americans from Arizona to *Sonora* in Mexico. However, this research showed the movements were based on seasonal changes only. In the case of *Ban Dan-Bane Maysingsamphane*, the *Thai Ban* cross the border daily. The repetitive border-crossings of the *Thai Ban* in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* differ from the seasonal border-crossings of the Native Americans because the *Thai Ban*'s everyday practices reveal the cyclical activities that are banal. Dean (2014) conducted ethnography on the Thai-Burmese border and reported that the national border was blurred when the *Moei* River border dried up. Neither Madsen (2014) nor Dean (2011) focused greatly on the meaning of the

natural border as this section aims to do. Lefebvre (2000) believed that a natural border is not neutral and analysed a rural area in the Pyrenees that acted as a link and a separation of the two nation-states of France and Spain. The acceptance of daily movements by locals across an international border highlighted by Lefebvre (2000) in the Pyrenees is relevant to the interpretations of the meanings of natural terrain as everyday strategies for the unofficial border-crossings by the *Thai Ban* on the Thai-Lao Mekong border. Lefebvre's research (2000, 2002) portrayed the occurrence of everyday practices together with the meaning-making of the surrounding terrain. As indicated in Chapter 3, people's everyday practices are involved with meaning-making in the semantic field. In this field, people are both the object and the subject; they interpret others and vice versa all the time. The concept of a semantic field is thus necessary to explain people's meaning-making process and it has four elements: sign, signal, symbol, and image (Lefebvre, 2002). These four elements are used to analyse the interpretation of the Mekong as a lived space.

4.3.1 The semantic field of the Mekong and *Thai Ban*'s everyday practices

The meaning of the border was metaphorically described by Nail (2016) as fence and wall. Regarding wall, when it is used to describe the border, it is the line that expels the flow of people. However, the fence is a line that separates two spaces but it also attracts the flow of people towards the very line. The Mekong is very often negotiated by the people who live in the area as a means of transport, a place to catch food based on the seasons, and a sacred space that spiritually binds people on both banks. They do not see it as a means to exclude people according to the territorial concept but regard it as the space where people come to. Lefebvre (2002, p. 276) defined the process of meaning and describing the world around the people's everyday lives as "a semantic field." A drawing by one very accomplished junior artist at *Khong Chiam Witthayakhom School*, Peerapol Kotanon, provided an example of the production of the semantic field when people make meaning of the world around them in their everyday lives²⁷. While the mainstream Thai and Lao states perceive the Mekong as the international border as found in school texts in both languages, the Mekong may be both the signifier and signified of the concept of territorial

²⁷ This artist did not sign the consent form but the picture was bought by me as a researcher.

integrity and also be simply a space to catch food and for transport, indicating that the relation of the signifier and signified changes, depending on the context. In addition, when speaking of the Mekong, other potential meanings occurred in the daily conversations of people who lived on both banks of the river. The negotiated meanings shape different people's everyday practices and their movements regarding the existence of the river border.



Picture 6: Drawing by Peerapol Kotanon. The Mun is in blue while the Mekong is in red. The national flag of Lao PDR is used to define Lao territory to the east of the Mekong.

In the drawing (see Picture 6 on page 109), the four elements of the semantic field tend to overlap so I analyse the four elements at one time all together. The Mun River is in blue while the Mekong is in red. The red colour of the Mekong represents the period of heavy rain that makes it muddy and the colour appears red. This change in colour indicates an abundance of big fish. One often heard the local expression that the Mekong was red, meaning fisherpersons must prepare to catch

big fish²⁸. The Mekong thus functioned not only as sign when it was red but also became a symbol of sacred space, because the amount of food depended on the mythological serpent god Naga in the river. The Mekong can also be interpreted as a signal because when it becomes muddy, the fishers must get ready for the new fishing season. The changes of the condition of the Mekong are not imperative, as Lefebvre (2002) explained in an urban situation in which drivers have to stop when seeing a red traffic light. However, a number of fishers in the *Thai Ban* village were always waiting and preparing their boats when the sky was cloudy and the Mekong was red. Lefebvre (2002, p. 309) referred to urban space as “the temple, the agora, the forum, the theatre,” and these urban constructions can be both signs and symbols. Accordingly, I apply similar concepts of signs, signals, and symbols that the Mekong was interpreted as both space in which to catch food and a sacred space as the area in which the mythological serpent god is believed to reside. People make meaning of the world around them and this semantic field idea plays a role in both urban areas, as indicated by Lefebvre (2002), and the borderland in my study.

The local perspective was in accord with the idea of Antonsich (2010) that people interpret and engage with the boundary. Therefore, the border is a lived space. Similarly, the *Thai Ban* look at the Mekong as a lived space in which the sacred serpent god Naga resides, indicating that there is no junction to filter the social flow in this meaning. This river border attracts people, especially those who worship the serpent god. The element of image is similar to symbol but differs in that it is “an individual work” (Lefebvre, 2002, p. 287), as it can set and arouse people’s emotions. The Naga statues, as works of art in the temple and in front of a number of restaurants in *Ban Dan Khong Chiam*, are symbolically and spiritually connected to the Mekong. These statutes function as an image to a number of local *Thai Ban*.

The Naga serpent god is believed to be both benign when pleased and malign when angry. People along the Mekong engage with the river in their everyday lives and light incense and pray to the Naga for prosperity (Chang, 2017; Hongsuwan, 2011). I observed at least five restaurants in *Ban Dan* that had Naga statues at their

²⁸ I heard this expression in April 2016, when it was cloudy and started to rain. *Thai Ban* fishers said in their daily conversations that they would wait until ‘*nam khong daeng*’ (the Mekong to become red). Then they would invite me to join their fishing.

entrances to their buildings for luck and all statues faced towards the Mekong (see Picture 7 on page 111). Also, the serpent god is normally present in all temples in the area. As found in the middle of the picture (see Picture 6 on page 109), two Naga statues decorated as a stair handrail lead the way to a temple facing towards the red Mekong. The two Naga statues as drawn by the young artist is located right in the middle of *Ban Dan Khong Chiam*, signifying its importance in this riverine community.



Picture 7: The Naga statue in front of a steakhouse run by a participant in this research. The statue looks toward the Mekong River.

The red Mekong in Picture 6 on page 109 may represent the sedentary assumption. The river is used as the boundary by the Thai and Lao states and the red colour represents the territorial indication that no one should proceed further. It means the Mekong is moreover perceived as territory in the sense of '*terra*' in Latin that refers to the land, and '*terrere*' that refers to a terrorising line drawn on space (Connolly,

2004). However, when it is coloured in the drawing, the Mekong as a terrorising space is not the only meaning as there are also interpretations as life space and space for transport. In practice, instead of being the space containing the flow of people, the Mekong was used as the space that facilitates the flow of the *Thai Ban*, especially boat-owners. While Lefebvre (2002) analysed the symbolic functions of the streets and street lights that control people's mobility, the Mekong may have similar functions in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*, similar to a street in an urban city. The Mekong was perceived as space for transport, as the boat-owners used their personal piers to facilitate their flow and circulation to the other side of the river without having to rely on the local administrations' quasi-state checkpoints. In the fieldwork time, there were cases when the *Thai Ban* daily left their home state in the morning to the host state for work and came back home for lunch. After lunch they crossed the border again to see friends, then came back home in the evening. According to my casual everyday conversations and reading student's essays in the field, this interpretation of the Mekong as a transport route is connected with its spiritual image, as when it rained heavily, some villagers were reluctant to resort to the boat for travel. If they had to travel, they were extra-careful and prayed to the Naga that their lives be spared.

4.4 Spatial negotiations: Quasi-state checkpoints and non-checkpoints in the Third Space

The centripetal approach focuses on the borderland as the centre of analysis and captures the unique characteristics of the Thai-Lao Mekong border in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*. I present this concept to epistemologically counter the hegemonic sedentary world view of the state and argue that pluralities of people's mobility occur every day in the borderland. This mobility does not always have to take place at the state junction such as formal checkpoints as examined in the first section. I present the feature of the Third Space as the in-between space of the Thai-Lao national boundary in which people, especially the *Thai Ban*, embrace the existence of the territory. In this section, I show three characteristics of the borderland as a Third Space. Firstly, the spatial management is related to people's flow management, even at the quasi-state checkpoints and non-checkpoints where the state officers

loosely apply the state-centric spatial interpretation as they think fit. Secondly, this borderland is an in-between space as the Mekong is interpreted both as territory and lived space. The situation discussed in the previous section that the Mekong as a lived space comes into play with the spatial practice that the Mekong is state territory. Thirdly, the spatial negotiations are never completed but involve an endless process in people's everyday practices. As a contribution to the existing literature, I show that in the in-between nature, pluralities of border-crossings in which people embrace, reject, and subvert the Mekong Thai-Lao territory are observable. As indicated by Howarth (2013), the meaning-making in regard to the Mekong floats as both lived space and territory that separates two national spaces, depending on the context.

4.4.1 People's management in the borderland

Examples of other literature focusing on formal checkpoints include the work of Salter (2008) who argued that the state of exception becomes the norm at formal checkpoints, Nail (2013) who employed the notion of biopolitics and disciplinary power to look at the control of the flow of people at the US-Mexican border, and the research of Vaughan-Williams (2009) that considered checkpoints located at airports in Europe. The focus of this thesis is the quasi-state checkpoints run by the local administration, making it unique in that other literature in Border Studies and Borderland Studies examined the formal checkpoints located either at the physical edges or in the hinterlands of states. As discussed in Chapter 2, the topographical and topological framework are mixed and then applied to the analysis of the quasi-state checkpoint. In *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*, the Thai and Lao states granted authority to the local administrations for them to organise their own regulations regarding everyday border-crossings. Similar research on quasi-state checkpoints on the Thai-Lao border has been completed, such as that of Walker (1999), but this was conducted before the millennium and these checkpoints became formal ones by the time I started writing this thesis. The most similar case to my thesis is that of Rungmanee (2014, 2016) who argued that there is a blurred feature of legality and illegality of those who make crossings to Thai territory and overstay to look for jobs. Some even move to the hinterland in Thai territory. I aim to add to this body of knowledge with my fieldwork showing the loose regulations of these quasi-state

checkpoints contribute to the variety of border-crossings in the area by the examination and revelation of the in-between nature of the borderland and the endless spatial negotiations.

The term 'negotiation' indicates that space is not always monopolised by the state and its sedentary assumption. While the Thai and Lao states themselves recognise the mobility for everyday matters such as fishing across the river used as the border, very often other prohibited matters such as undocumented crossings and overstays for employment are ignored by the state officers themselves. This is especially evident as the Thai territory is the space perceived as more developed in terms of economic opportunity (Rigg, 2005, 2007, 2014), and the area of *Ban Dan Khong Chiam* attracts labourers from Lao territory on the other side of the river.

The quasi-state checkpoints in *Ban Dan Khong Chiam* were explained by Somboon, 49, a former Thai military officer who runs a steakhouse business and works at *Ban Dan Khong Chiam Administration Office* at the time of my fieldwork.²⁹ Somboon is respected by the community as he is not only a former military officer but during his free time, he is an official referee for the Football Association of Thailand (FAT) and employed by the Thailand professional football lower league. He also coaches members of the younger generation every day. Somboon said that to train the young ones to play football prevents them from getting addicted to drugs that are rumoured to be transported from the other side of the river (Lao PDR) and that damages the harmony of *Ban Dan Khong Chiam*.

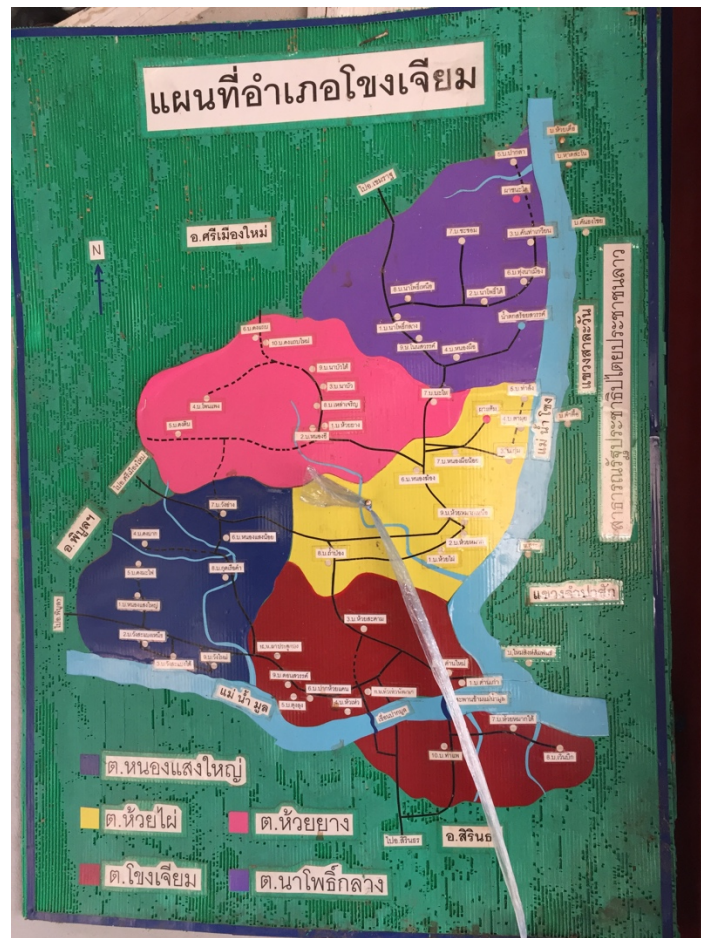
Regarding the border-crossings, one day in the interview in the wet season, Somboon stated that there are four piers that function as junctions, based on the terminology of Nail (2016), to filter the flow in *Ban Dan* and *Bane Maysingsamphane*. One is in *Bane Maysingsamphane* in Lao PDR and three are in *Ban Dan* on the Thai side. Two of these three piers are for Thai people, one is in the east run by the association (*khiw*) (Ken, my participant, is a member), and the other is in the west adjacent to townhouses provided as residences for police officers. At the west pier, sometimes, the naval officers operate manual checks of newcomers. Sometimes, the

²⁹ Somboon is not his real name. Interview with Somboon took place on 27 June 2016.

officers from the Custom Bureau check the newcomers. The east pier has no manual checking because Lao people are not allowed to enter the Thai state via this channel. On the other side of the river, there is only one pier for Lao people. Boats carry goods and people back to *Bane Maysingsamphane* and, according to my observations, seldom were these goods checked by Lao custom officers.

People are able to cross the river border unofficially but, in practice, they should not move beyond the area of one village in the host state, said Somboon. The regulations that indicate the limit line in the host state and the locations of the piers for border-crossings officially documented could not be acquired but were observed in people's routines. The boundaries of each village are not clearly indicated either, despite a map of sub-districts in the deputy head's village in *Ban Tha Phae* (see Picture 8 on page 116). The area on the Thai side is indicated but the spatial details are not specifically clarified. Different colours on the map indicated different sub-districts, and each sub-district comprised a couple of villages, but only their names are shown. On the Lao side, only the name of *Bane Maysingsamphane* and other Lao villages to the north are visible without any indications of village boundaries.

It is not only the local administrations who practise these loose regulations in relation to space and border-crossings as, at times, the central government intervenes by reconfirming the territorial logic of the existence of the Mekong in issues such as drug dealings and prostitution. It must be noted that in this area, it is not only officers who check the flow of the people at the shelters close to the west pier in *Ban Dan*. Sometimes, officers are mobile and checking may take place anywhere in the border zone. Somboon told me that he was part of the civilian-military joint operation to arrest suspects of trans-state drug dealing in nearby villages on occasions, but not all of these villages were necessarily located by the Mekong. My observations supported the interview of Somboon as I saw police officers checking people's ID card in *Ban Tha Phae*, an area that did not have a quasi-state checkpoint. It is well-known that the arrivals of newcomers will be checked every week at the quasi-state checkpoints, but the mobile checking takes place randomly. In the six months of my fieldwork, I witnessed at least three occasions of mobile checking.



Picture 8: Local map in the deputy village headman's office at *Khum Pak Mun, Ban Tha Phae* that details spatial information at the sub-district level in Thai territory

The mobile checkpoints in *Khong Chiam* can be explained by the application of terminology introduced by Nail (2016). There are three kinds of checkpoints, police checkpoints, security checkpoints, and information checkpoints, and these were not necessarily located in particular locations (Nail, 2016). Police checkpoints are mobile and aim to tackle potential disorder in advance, and this type of checkpoint is scattered among various villages in the borderland of *Khong Chiam*, according to my observations. The potential issues, as a result of pressure by the Thai government in Bangkok, most concentrates on are drug trafficking and prostitution. At times, reconfirmation of the territorial state has to be practised as commanded by the central government without much advance information to locals. I found that undocumented labourers involved in the karaoke bars were checked for work permits, while undocumented labourers in other businesses were not heeded that much. This arbitrary reconfirmation of state space provides examples of the pluralities in border-crossings that co-exists with local regulations in the area.

Certainly, spatial negotiations took place as people who were policed were not passive. I witnessed that they tried to continue their spatial movements by sometimes conforming to what was required by the state, such as presenting work permits when the police came to check. For those without such documents, they knew in advance, to my surprise, that there was going to be a mobile police check so the workplace was closed on that day, according to my observations together with information from Somboon. The following day, the place was open and business continued as usual.

4.4.2 The Thai-Lao Mekong borderland as a space of in-betweenness

Another characteristic of the Third Space in the borderland is that it is an in-between space with no clear-cut divide in terms of spatial interpretations. Accordingly, the various meanings of the Mekong endlessly shape one another in the everyday practices of the *Thai Ban*. These endless negotiations are examples of the floating of meanings (Howarth, 2013). To further push the concept of riverscape (Sankhamanee, 2009), the river is not simply a territory or a space to catch food. The Mekong River is variously interpreted, as signifiers such as the words 'river' and 'territory' in relation to 'ways to visit family and friends' and 'space to look for food' were interpreted differently by different people. The floating of the signifiers and signifieds revealed the nature of the in-betweenness in this Third Space. For example, the Mekong was interpreted as firstly a territory that divided two national spaces in regard to economics and secondly as a route that connected family and friends in the riverine villages on both banks. Regarding the first major meaning assigned to the river border, Thai territory provides more economic opportunities to Lao citizens than Lao territory. This meaning of the Mekong as a divide of two economic spheres exists in the thoughts and practices of the *Thai Ban*. The regulations of the local administration of *Ban Dan Khong Chiam* related to border-crossings (one day stay for Lao citizens in Thai territory from approximately 08.00 to 16.30 on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays) make searches for work difficult and some potential job-seekers have to subvert the regulations and overstay. They often make extended visits to family and friends, leading to emergence of the second major meaning of the Mekong as ways to connect with relatives. The Mekong is seen as a division of economic spheres but this meaning floats back and forth with

the river as the bridge to visit family and friends. The floating of the two sets of meanings reveals the nature of the in-betweenness, a common practice in this borderland.

4.4.3 Endless spatial negotiations

The in-between nature of this borderland has been researched by other scholars in Border Studies and Borderland Studies, some comparable to my study. For example, Abraham and Van Schendel (2005) stated that one characteristic of the Third Space is that it is difficult to distinguish the legality or otherwise of the everyday practices of borderland people. They examined the meaning of the state's definition of legitimate (legal) and the locals' idea of border-crossers as legitimate (licit):

Many transnational movements of people, commodities, and ideas are illegal because they defy the norms and rules of formal political authority, but they are quite acceptable, "licit", in the eyes of participants in these transactions and flows. To categorise between illegal and licit practices, a qualitative difference of scale and intent between the activities of internationally organized criminal gangs or networks and the scores of micro-practices that, while often illegal in a formal sense, are not driven by a structural logic of organisation and unified people (Abraham and Van Schendel 2005, p. 22)

Accordingly, some cross-border activities may not conform to the law promulgated by the centre of the state but are seen by local people as licit. For example, Rungmanee (2014) argued that undocumented Lao labourers were usually hired to farm in Thai territory in Mukdahan. The labourers were illegal but they were not criminals according to the state's categorisation. They were therefore licit according to the borderland *Thai Ban*. The local Thai police disregarded this because they expected the *Thai Ban*'s co-operation in surveillance of trans-border drug trafficking in the area in return (Rungmanee, 2014). In this case, the legality of everyday practices was blurred. During my fieldwork, similar blurred legal features were found in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*, as unofficial modes of border-crossings occurred every day. The local administrations of *Bane Maysingsamphane* and *Ban Dan* permit unofficial visits to the neighbouring states but limited people's movements to within

the areas of the host villages. However, some go beyond these limited areas. The *Thai Ban* and local state officers are aware of these practices but do not mention their legal status as such practices are common. Moving beyond one village in the host state, Thailand in this case, is illegal but licit, if applying the terminology of Abraham and Van Schendel (2005). However, I add that, before illegal activities become licit, there must be repetition and spatial negotiations need to be repeated. For example, state officers who are supposed to implement the state-centric spatial practice need to encounter undocumented labourers on a number of occasions until the officers learn that it is the common practice in the area. The state-centric interpretation partially gave way to the undocumented labourers who worked in the area.

Everyday spatial negotiations took place in my fieldwork location. I observed that some state officers were especially strict with undocumented border-crossings but as time went by, after a few encounters, these officers became less strict and tolerated undocumented border-crossings. Somboon, for example, realised that it is not practical to impose all the regulations to contain people's mobility and to force them to enter and leave via the quasi-state checkpoints at all times because undocumented labourers are licit in the area. Similar to the findings of Abraham and Van Schendel (2005) and Rungmanee (2014, 2016), my research shows the feature of the blurred nature of legality and illegality in *Khong Chiam Sanasomboun* and I argue that this is not only a feature of the in-betweenness of the borderland as a Third Space but also that spatial negotiations must be continuous before they become legitimate.

Somboon turned a blind eye to the illegality of undocumented labourers. A female employee in Somboon's restaurant was undocumented. In this case, spatial negotiations occurred as in the interview, Somboon justified the presence of the female employee to me by saying that she had to feed her poor family in Lao PDR and working with him was better than her going to a karaoke bar to work as a prostitute. Meanwhile, the arrest of prostitutes from Lao PDR in *Ban Dan Khong Chiam* had just taken place at the time of the interview, and he claimed that the justification of the employee's undocumented presence should be permitted for ethical reasons. As Somboon was a former military officer, this may have contributed

to the fact that no local officer wanted to intervene in his business. Still, I argue that the spatial negotiations were never completed as, when I left the fieldwork site, the female employee we discussed in the interview had returned to Lao PDR.

4.5 Conclusion

On the Thai-Lao border, the sedentary norm has been prevalent in both the policy-making process and some academic writings. People are assumed to remain in fixed territories limited by state boundaries, and any crossing of borders requires the approval of the state. The existence of state boundaries is a primary concern and people's mobility is exceptional, meaning their movements that cross the territory must be approved by the state. This chapter argues that the prevalent sedentary assumption is not the only interpretation. I agree with Cunningham and Heyman (2004) that the rigid state control of space and people's mobility can be observed at certain places such as formal checkpoints. In other areas where there is no formal checkpoint, pluralities of border-crossings are evident. For example, people, especially the *Thai Ban* who mostly rely on subsistence economy, interact with the existence of the state boundary and they negotiate with the interpretation of space when they cross the border. In the areas where quasi-state checkpoints exist, border-crossings occur on an everyday basis for some people who lead their lives in the borderland. These border-crossings have a cyclical dimension until they become routine, especially for the *Thai Ban* in the borderland of *Khong Chiam* and *Sanasomboun*. The locals are not passive and confined by the existence of the border but interact with it every day. I argue in this chapter that the pluralities of border-crossings can be witnessed in the borderland of *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*. As the Mekong can be interpreted in the locals' everyday practices as both territory that divides two national spaces and space of life, the meanings endlessly float. Sometimes, the *Thai Ban* cross the border without any difficulty as they interpret the river as a lived space to catch food and to use as a way of transport. At other times, the river is taken as state territory when the same group of people provide boat services at inflated prices to tourists who want to cross to another nation-state. This floating of meaning is endlessly negotiated in the everyday practices of the people in the area, especially at the times of encounters between

political actors with state-centric spatial interpretations, such as newly-appointed officers and those who rely on subsistence economy and take the river as a space of life.

This chapter has firstly outlined the prevalent assumption of the sedentary norm as practised at most borders worldwide with the analysis of the formal checkpoint at *Chong Mek-Phonethong*. This formal border checkpoint can be described as a site where spatial enclosure that slows down people's mobility takes place (Cunningham & Heyman, 2004). I have shown that the *Thai Ban* at *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* found it both politically and economically costly to cross the nation-state border via this formal checkpoint at a distance from the practices of their everyday lives. The analysis of biopolitics and disciplinary techniques that require the people's conformity at this checkpoint are familiar and embraced by citizens of both states, such as tourists and business entrepreneurs. However, for those who rely on subsistence economy, they find it uncomfortable because they are not familiar with the formalities of paying fees, being photographed, and having their personal information recorded.

Secondly, I have shown the interpretation of the Thai-Lao border at *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* as a lived space in which the *Thai Ban* with personal boats and piers catch food and employ as a means of transport. Only very infrequently has the state junction been used to impede those who fish and look for food in the river and its islets as these activities are parts of their everyday routines endorsed by the 1926 Franco-Siamese Treaty. Also, the natural terrain matters in the everyday spatial interpretations and practices of border-crossings. I propose that the natural terrain of the border matters in that I have applied the concept of semantic field as used by Lefebvre (2002) with everyday practices in this chapter. The use of the semantic field elements of signs, symbols, signals, and images contributes to the pluralities of border-crossings in people's everyday lives on the Mekong. Changes in the conditions of the river, such as the colour and the water levels, affect the practices of the local *Thai Ban* regarding crossing, fishing, shopping, and visiting. I have also portrayed spiritual elements in the changes of the conditions of the river that result in decision-making about crossings.

I have thirdly argued that, most importantly, there is an interplay between the two major interpretations of the Mekong as territory on the one hand and lived space on the other when border-crossings are made through quasi-state checkpoints run by the local administrations of *Ban Dan Khong Chiam* and *Bane Maysingsamphane*. The pluralities of border-crossings can be observed at the quasi-state checkpoints and in the adjacent areas as Thai citizens have channels of border-crossings which differ from those of Lao citizens. Two piers for departure are set up for people from Thai territory while there is only one pier for both arrivals and departures and one for arrivals in Lao territory. The sedentary assumption is not always present but does not completely disappear either. Spatial negotiations are endless with this loose regulation of people's management by the local administrations.

The contribution of this thesis is not only about the analysis of the specific method of people's flow management at quasi-state checkpoints that portrays the endless spatial negotiations. As stated by Nail (2016), the nature of the Third Space is not limited to spatial analysis, and I have included the temporal analysis in this borderland. I argue that the analysis of space is connected to time in everyday practices. For example, to move from one place to another involves time. The analysis of mobility in tandem with time in the borderland helps clarify the pluralities of the border-crossings. Using the notion of everyday practices of Lefebvre (1971, 2000, 2002), temporal analysis is crucial and has been taken as one dimension of the contribution to the literature, and is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 - Temporal negotiations in the borderland as a Third Space

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have shown that pluralities of spatial negotiations are evident as the locals who cross the border ignore, reject, embrace, and subvert the national logic of the Thai-Lao border. Drawing on the notion of everyday life by Lefebvre (1971, 2002), the riverscape of the Mekong as a space of life and an international border co-exist. Researchers such as Little (2015) and Reeves (2016) argued that there is excessive focus on the analysis of spatial negotiations and that temporality is undervalued. I believe that weaving the negotiations of temporality, space, and political subjectivities together adds to the present analysis of border-crossings. This chapter provides the analysis of temporal negotiations and complements the analysis of the previous chapter that pluralities of border-crossings do not only occur according to spatial dimensions.

The constitutive temporal negotiations contribute to the pluralities of border-crossings. I build on the idea of *chronos* and *kairos* of Hutchings (2008) that they are interrelated, together with the everyday notion of Lefebvre (1971, 2002). This notion may be classified into cyclical and linear. Cyclical activities involve ones such as the daily fishing of the river, while the time taken to travel between home and the river is linear. If the trip from home to river is repeated, it becomes also cyclical. Therefore, cyclical and linear activities cannot be neatly separated. Everyday activities can be both chronotic and kairotic because they are involved with repetition, progress, and decay. *Chronos* refers to the modernist interpretation of time of formal schedules, often controlled by the state (Hutchings, 2008; Lindroos, 1998). *Kairos* involves decisions to break or conform to the schedules (Lindroos, 1998; 2008). I argue that a kairotic moment explains the everyday practices of the people especially when it shapes and is shaped by chronotic schedules. The everyday border-crossings which are the focus of this thesis are based on timetables of the state and the people making crossings interpret time in their decisions to conform to the state or not. On

some occasions, local *Thai Ban* cross borders according to the chronotic time schedules of the state and local administrations at the quasi-state checkpoints, and also help local officers practise the *chronos* of the state by reporting border-crossings that do not conform to state timetables, such as tourists who cross outside the nominated times. At other times, the movements of the *Thai Ban* depend on the natural dynamics of the river border that can occur anytime. I argue that chronotic and kairotic time co-exist at the quasi-state checkpoints and in areas with no checkpoints. *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* is an example of the co-existence of these two types of time and its contribution to the pluralities of the border-crossings. Similar to the task of the previous chapter that related to spatial negotiations, the pluralities of border-crossings are examined in this chapter to show that *chronos* and *kairos* shape each other in temporal analysis.

Accordingly, I discuss the second sub-research question of the thesis that examines the ways in which the concept of time constitutes people's everyday border-crossings of the Thai-Lao border at *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*. The question asks *What are the ways in which temporal pluralities are negotiated in the border-crossings on the riverine Thai-Lao border at Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun?* This research question is moreover divided into three questions which structure the discussion of this chapter as follows: The first asks *What are the ways in which time is produced by the Thai and Lao states regarding border-crossings activities and are there any other temporal negotiations in border-crossings?* As such, the chapter firstly aims to show that the states' chronotic time practised at international borders is not the only temporality that takes place there. The centres of the states, Bangkok and Vientiane, are not the only actors who control time on this riverine border. People crossing the border at the formal checkpoint at *Chong Mek-Phonethong* are expected to conform to the state timetable. Approximately 30 kilometres away from this checkpoint, others using the quasi-state checkpoints at *Ban Dan*, *Khong Chiam*, and *Bane Maysingsamphane* conform to the timetables organised by local administrations. This first section offers the analysis of biopolitics at the formal border checkpoints to give an overview of the state's expectations in terms of time, paving the way to the analysis of *kairos* and *chronos* in the following sections.

The second question asks *What are the ways in which the Thai Ban interpret time in the natural terrain of the Mekong border and how do they use this interpretation to negotiate the state's chronotic time?* Here, my aim is to examine the riverscape that depends on the natural dynamics along the Mekong Thai-Lao border. Sankhamanee (2009) used the term 'riverscape' to describe people's varied perceptions of the Mekong River in the everyday practices of dealing with seasonal dynamics and state regulations on this border. While Sankhamanee (2009) used the term in relation to space, I apply it in this chapter in relation to the temporal dimension. The everyday practices of the border-crossings of the *Thai Ban* may be interpreted as using the river as a life space to catch food and visit friends and families on the other side of the river. The riverscape of the Mekong as a natural terrain shapes the temporal pattern of the people significantly, such as when to wake up, when to fish the river, and when to cross the border for shopping.

The third question asks *What are the ways in which different actors in the borderland of Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun negotiate the chronotic timetables at the quasi-state checkpoints?* By answering this question, I aim to show how local actors both embrace and subvert the chronotic time of the local administrations of *Ban Dan* and *Bane Maysingsamphane*. The people from *Bane Maysingsamphane* are expected to cross the border to *Ban Dan* on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays from 08.30 to 16.30 but in practice, flexibility was observed in border-crossings. People from the Thai side are able to cross the border everyday according to a similar schedule. Nevertheless, the temporal practices between the villages are not strict. A number of actors in this borderland benefit from and embrace this timetable. Undocumented labourers from Lao PDR subvert this timetable by overstaying in Thai territory as they seek better economic opportunities in *Ban Dan*. The local *Thai Ban* who cross borders do not totally reject state and quasi-state timetables but choose to embrace and subvert them, depending on which is most beneficial to them.

5.2 Chronotic time of the state: Disciplinary power and biopolitics

This section begins with an examination of the assumed and state-centric time by which a state aims to control people, defined by Hutchings (2008) as *chronos*. While chronotic time is supposedly practised by the state, chronotic timetables are likely to be taken for granted in the mainstream social sciences (Adam, 1990; Hutchings, 2008). This section questions the hegemony of *chronos* and the state temporal monopoly at the *Chong Mek-Phonethong* border checkpoint by the Thai and Lao states, applying the notions of disciplinary power and biopolitical practice of Foucault (1995, 2008). It also presents the chronotic attempt of the state to control time in the areas where there are no formal checkpoints, such as my fieldwork site in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*. This analysis of the formal checkpoints illustrates the imposition of chronotic time by the state and its control of border-crossings. Cunningham and Heyman (2004) proposed the idea of border enclosures practised by the state at certain locations such as formal checkpoints. The formal checkpoint at *Chong Mek-Phonethong* is an example of this practice of time by the state that is not present throughout much of the 1810 kilometres of the Thai-Lao border. This section, in addition, presents the implementation of *chronos* at a school in this borderland area where there is no formal checkpoint. Time practised at school is an important element of the Third Space because it reveals the attempts of the state to train young generation to embrace the state temporality in an environment where people practise time differently especially in border-crossing activities. These examples pave the way to the analysis of temporal negotiations in the following sections.

5.2.1 *Chronos* of the state at formal checkpoints

The previous chapter discusses spatial negotiations and I presented the spatial assumption of the state as unified to be problematic and criticised by Walker (1993). Boundaries cannot be perceived as hard lines that completely separate different national spaces and one cannot assume that the inside state space is orderly and unified. I apply this criticism by Walker (1993) of a supposedly unified state space according to the Westphalian concept to say that the time of the state cannot be unified either – one cannot assume that there is only one single unidirectional time in a state. Hutchings (2008) said state-controlled time is categorised as *chronos*, the cyclical and progressive feature of life, and refers to the time that is perceived as

normal in a society. The assumption is that in a modern Westphalian state, territorial space is rigid and time is chronotic as it is measured by clocks, timetables, and calendars, making it manageable and predictable. The introduction of the concept of *chronos* in the Industrial Revolution replaced other earlier measurements of time, such as sunrises, sunsets, and tides. Adam (1990, p. 105) argued that “timetables, schedules, and deadlines” are temporal measurements in industrial societies that developed in tandem with modern state space.

5.2.2 *Chronos* and biopolitics on the Thai-Lao border

The practice of biopolitics is evident on the Thai-Lao border and can be explained in two ways with the application of Foucault’s analysis (1980, 2003). First, biopolitics was introduced to regulate populations. A population was treated as a kind of species and biological language was used, such as the term ‘body’ (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2010). Human bodies thus were used to “maximize its forces and integrate it into efficient systems” of the state (Rabinow & Rose, 2011, p. 196). As discussed in the previous chapter on biopolitics and spatial control by the state at formal checkpoints, Ken and I were required by the state to cross the border via certain channels involving the space provided and we were expected to conform if a crossing was to be made. We were directed through an underground tunnel after having all personal data and belongings checked. We exited and came out of the underground tunnel in Lao territory. Our bodies were directed through a particular channel provided by the Thai and Lao states. This direction of our bodies through this particular channel is an example of biopolitical practice. Rabinow and Rose (2011, p. 196) regarded such a practice as an attempt to “maximize” the efficiency of the state, and may also be seen as an orderly check for threats. Chronotic time was practised while we moved through the tunnel as surveillance by the state ensured conformity to its rules. Conceptually speaking, biopolitics is the control of the flow of the “bodies” (Foucault, 2003, p. 249) by such a factor as surveillance. At the time of the crossing by Ken and me, our time was frozen as we were checked by Thai and Lao officers.

Crossing at the official checkpoint at *Chong Mek-Phonethong* approximately 30 kilometres from *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*, is advantageous for those with

passports as they are allowed to stay in the host state for up to 30 days. However, non-passport holders are only allowed to stay for three days and two nights, according to the 1997 agreements on crossings between Thailand and Lao PDR. Persons are officially allowed to make crossings from 06.00 to 20.00 every day. These times are set by the Thai and Lao states so that border-crossers can make a legal entry or departure, and state officers are able to check, collect fees, and record people's mobility. Modern equipment, such as scanning machines for the detection of weapons, computers to record personal ID cards, and CCTV, operates at the *Chong Mek-Phonethong* formal checkpoint. Here, the timetable to cross the border relates to *chronos*. During the fieldwork, I crossed the border at this checkpoint and, as a Thai citizen, embraced the concept of *chronos* and visited *Pakse* in Lao PDR twice. I had no problem being watched by CCTV and my ID card was verified upon the crossings. I was required to show my ID card/passport and pay the fee. Both times, although I had a passport, I decided not to use it but only show a Thai national ID card, meaning that I was able to stay in Lao PDR only for two nights and three days. Upon crossing, I paid 30 baht for a border pass at the bureau located 200 metres away from where the passports and ID cards were checked on the Thai side. After I was issued a border pass (two photocopies of my ID card rubber-stamped by the Thai authority), I took them to be recorded at the border fence. I handed one of the photocopies to the Thai officers to make a request to leave Thai territory. After verification of my personal identification, I was allowed to make the crossing and directed into the underground tunnel. My 'body' was regulated to move in a particular direction when crossing territory controlled by two sovereign powers, according to the notion of biopolitics. Along the way, there were several CCTVs and I was aware that I was watched by Thai officers. I exited the tunnel and made another request to enter Lao PDR. I handed over the second photocopy and paid 100 baht to enter Lao PDR legally.

As I conformed to the state's timetable, my crossings posed no problems and were uneventful. Other researchers offered similar situations where biopolitics is practised at other border checkpoints. For example, the Registered Traveller Programme was installed to speed up some approved newcomers and delay others suspected of being threats to EU territory (Leese, 2016). This process of selecting to approve and disapprove newcomers resulted in long queues at checkpoints at the EU borders

due to careful management. A Smart Border Package (Leese, 2016) was introduced to speed up the passage of *bona fide* travellers to filter the flow of people from the non-EU zones. Similar to the formal checkpoints at *Chong Mek-Phonethong*, personal information of travellers was checked, recorded and their belongings were checked with x-ray machines to ensure that there was no threat to the host state.

The application of temporal analysis in my case in the previous paragraph is concerned with speed. Similarly, time studied by those who focussed on the issue of border-crossing activities relates to speed too. Harvey (1992, p. 260) introduced the notion of “time-space compression” to define the speed of movement from place to place, leading to a borderless world in the present era due to developments in transport and telecommunications. Smart and Smart parodied this idea with the phrase “time-space punctuation” (2008, p. 175) by stating that the world is borderless for some people but others may have their temporal flows interrupted. Border checkpoints between Hong Kong and mainland China were highlighted as some persons’ movements across the border were not stopped while others experienced “full stops” and were denied entry (Smart & Smart, 2008, p. 175). On the Thai-Lao border, as argued by High (2009), to cross the border for some people may take more time, and some may be marginalised due to their legal status. At this formal checkpoint, High (2009) said border checkpoints are constructed for the benefit of people such as tourists when they cross the Thai-Lao border. Poor people who want to cross the border for better economic opportunities are marginalised when they use these channels, as shown by the experiences of High’s participants, who lived more than 50 kilometres from *Champassak*, Lao PDR, trying to look for jobs in Thailand.

However, the temporal elements of Ken’s and my movements to make crossings at the formal checkpoint may be explained in regard to not only the notion of speed. I propose that the actual time of practice which relates to past experiences with the anticipation of what is to come should be brought into analysis. According to the idea of Lindroos (1998), how time is subjectively put into practice is about how past experiences and anticipation of the future affects the judgement of people’s everyday activities. In this case, the everyday activities are about border-crossings. Ken and I had different feelings about the crossing at the formal checkpoints. For me, as a Thai citizen, I had the past experience that crossing at *Chong Mek-Phonethong* posed no

problem and I was able to embrace the state's practice of time. I had the experience of being slowed down while showing personal identification not only at that checkpoint but also in other parts of the world. Therefore, I knew what to do at that time and what came next. I was fully aware that I would be allowed to pass without much difficulty. Therefore, to make crossing there did not consume much time for me. Employing the terminology of Hutchings (2008), after getting through or the formalities at the checkpoint, my time in Lao PDR was chronotic because I conformed to all requirements and the biopolitical practices of the two states. If *chronos* is defined as frozen time and must be fixed, as criticised by Lindroos (1998), the situation I experienced at the checkpoint at *Chong Mek-Phonethong* is an example of the state's attempt to control time. My time was depoliticised while the crossing was made. Conforming to the discipline as a docile body, if applying Foucault's term, I was checked by the officers and went through the tunnel and exited in the other territorial space of Lao PDR. The states expected that the temporal mobility of myself to be "orderly", using Lindroos' wording to describe my situation (1998, p. 43).

I argue that in everyday practices, such orderly time that is state-centric does not always exist and *kairos* plays a significant role at this checkpoint. I agree with Lindroos (1998) that in privileging *chronos*, even at formal checkpoints, the notion of disorderly negotiations of temporality in everyday practices is played down. I propose that kairotic judgements of people are employed to explain the flow of people at this junction. The fact that *chronos* and *kairos* shape each other may be explained by the in-between nature of the borderland as a Third Space. This occurs when a member of the *Thai Ban* judges whether to conform to *chronos* or not. An example of such a judgement occurred in the case of Ken and I regarding past experiences of crossings. I felt at ease because I was used to these kinds of formalities, while Ken felt uncomfortable. He did not directly tell me why but one possible reason was that he felt to pay the fee to both Thai and Lao states was too expensive. I concluded from everyday conversations with him and his wife that they had experiences of abuse by Thai and Lao officers through biopolitical practices at such formal checkpoints, such as the jailing of the wife because of her statelessness and demands for 'under the table' money. Thus, kairotic moments of judgement explains as actual and contingent practices of time affected the chronotic expectation of time at that checkpoint. Ken and

I differently interpreted and expected what was to come. I expected no problems but Ken feared abuse, even though he conformed to the chronotic timetable. Kairotic judgements played a role as we made crossings, even though we conformed to the state *chronos*.

The paragraph above explains why to cross the border involving a distance of a few hundred metres consumes less time for me compared with Ken's experience. It took more time for Ken to handle all the document procedures. He was not sure what he should do. Being semi-literate, he handed the wrong documents to the Thai officers. The officers thought that he was a merchant trying to bring goods from Lao PDR to sell in Thai territory. This requires a different set of documents to those of a tourist. Therefore, Ken had to get the documents fixed. He went back and forth among different buildings. Partly, Ken had experiences of being looked down upon and exploited by both Thai and Lao officers and that resulted in his discomfort. I had to help him talk to the officers so his procedures were handled at the same speed as mine. I paid the crossing fee for him so we were able to successfully make the crossing.

5.2.3 *Chronos at an education institution*

The expectation of the state that citizens have the same unified national spatial practice is formulated in the print culture, such as school texts, newspapers and visual presentations of national map (Winichakul, 1994). Education institutions therefore play an important role in formulating this national and unified spatial interpretation, especially on the Thai-Lao border during colonial days as discussed by Winichakul (1994). This spatial interpretation is called the geobody of a nation (Winichakul, 1994). As space is related to temporality, the state also expects that time is controlled in a unified manner. For example, everywhere in the Thai state, every civil servant office plays the national anthem at 08.00. This not only happens at military barracks and police stations but also at all the bureaucratic offices. Similarly, schools play a crucial role in producing this time controlled by the state as a form of state *chronos*. This *chronos* is also produced in the borderland area where the pluralities of time are practised.

In *Ban Dan*, there is no official checkpoint with the equipment that records and controls the border-crossings. This does not mean that the *chronos* of the state completely disappears in this borderland. I entered the fieldwork in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* as a school teacher and participated in the chronotic activities of the state's education system. The pattern of these activities showed the nationalism of the centre of the state of Bangkok. Students come to school before 08.00 and attend a daily ceremony. At the time of my fieldwork, the ceremony included the lining-up of all 830 students in front of the Thai national flag to listen to teachers addressing them in Thai via a microphone. There was some evidence of the occasional use of a hybridised *Isan-Lao* language at the school only 50 metres from the international border. Afterwards, the microphone will be handed to student leaders who lead the ceremony, which includes singing the Thai national anthem, praying to Lord Buddha, and then vowing to the national flag to be loyal to the monarchy, religion, and nation. At the end of the morning ceremony, daily information is presented to students, and sport and/or academic achievements at provincial levels are announced. After the ceremony, classes begin at 08.30. At 15.30, a daily afternoon ceremony is organised and the same activities, such as singing the Thai national anthem, praying to Lord Buddha, and vowing to be loyal to the monarchy, are repeated. Students are allowed to go home at 16.00. Such nationalistic ceremonies held twice daily are a repetition of the nationalistic narrative to remind the students that they are Thai. Chronotic time of the Thai state is accordingly practised twice a day. However, local temporalities become more complicated when border-crossings are made via a quasi-state checkpoint, located around 200 metres from the school, as political checks by the states of the departure pathways differ from the official checkpoint mentioned in the previous section.

Border-crossings outside the expected chronotic times to avoid the biopolitics of the state at formal checkpoints were discussed in a number of authors' research but not many focussed on the interplay between *chronos* and *kairos*. Massey, Duran, and Pren (2016) and Topak (2014) found that people who may be of a politically and economically inferior status manage to find their own ways to negotiate borders. I found a similar situation on the Thai-Lao border as such people do not have to cross via formal checkpoints where the state surveillance is in operation but used the natural terrain of the Mekong River border. Those people who live along the river cross it daily as they regard it as territory and a lived space. The temporal situation with these

interpretations of border-crossings in the areas with quasi-state checkpoints and without checkpoints differs from that at the formal checkpoint.

5.3 Kairotic rhythms in the Mekong as a space of life

The incongruence of meaning between signifier and signified as “floating” (Howarth, 2013, p. 243) is used by poststructuralists to counter mainstream social science that the relationship between the signifier and signified is always fixed. In the previous chapter, I showed that this floating of meaning contributes to different spatial interpretations and the pluralities of border-crossings in the Mekong Thai-Lao borderland. This floating of meaning not only influences people’s everyday practices in terms of space but also shapes their practices in terms of temporality. Accordingly, I apply this concept of floating meaning to the everyday practices of the *Thai Ban* in *Ban Dan* and *Bane Maysingsamphane* and add that the floating of meaning has temporal connotations which may be based on the natural dynamics of the seasons that affect ways in which the *Thai Ban* cross and live along the border. When the Mekong is employed as a space of life, its interpretation according to the chronotic time of the state is sometimes suspended. Most state officers allow the *Thai Ban* to lead their lives according to their kairotic interpretations but, at times, the state officers may reconfirm its temporal meaning attached to state space, resulting in checks of the *Thai Ban* and renegotiations of temporal interpretations so that their journeys may continue.

5.3.1 Floating meaning and time on the riverine border

Temporal elements at the Mekong River border occur when the *Thai Ban* interpret the border and complete border-crossings as part of their everyday lives. The activities of border-crossings may be explained by *kairos* in that a *Thai Ban* makes a judgement to cross related his/her past experiences and their anticipation of what is to come. This temporal dimension is kairotic because it is related to the temporality of nature that is not easily controlled by the state. For example, heavy rain means it is time to go to the river and fish, especially in the wet season. For those who cross

the border to shop, heavy rain means it is time to consider decisions to cross due to the overwhelming volume of the water in the river.

Each crossing thus contains temporal elements involving the past, present, and future. Ken regards the Mekong as the area where he catches food and decisions to cross it considers the natural and seasonal dynamics. Times to catch food have cyclical and linear dimensions for which scheduled time is irrelevant. This is acknowledged in the legislation such as the 1926 Franco-Siamese Treaty. However, this temporal dimension is still under surveillance by occasional spot checks on the river by the officers of both states. The *Thai Ban* who fished at *Ban Tha Phae, Khum Pak Mun* crossed the river border because the Mekong is not only a signifier of the national border but a place to catch food. This interpretation of the Mekong as a lived space is based on their past experiences that the *Thai Ban*'s everyday journeys are seldom interrupted by state officers. A *Thai Ban* such as Ken wakes up at approximately 06.00 in the dry season as he does not have to visit the nets or complete the *yammong* activity³⁰. The past experiences of Ken as a boat-owner tell him that 06.00 is a good time to go to the river. Though he may cross the thalweg, past experiences indicate few interruptions by officers. From May to September (the wet season), fishing becomes more competitive and Ken rises earlier to make sure others, who may be from *Bane Maysingsamphane* and other villages, may steal the fish caught in his net. During the time of the fieldwork, Ken rose at 05.30 and arrived at his personal pier a few minutes before 06.00. The *yammong* took one hour, and the temporal flow of the journey from his house to the nets and back was not interrupted. Ken, with his own boat, did not have to use the pier organised by *Ban Dan* administration, meaning that he was able to continue his trip without interference.

Once his work was done, he occasionally later crossed the river to see his friends in *Bane Maysingsamphane* if he was bored in the afternoon. He did not always return for dinner as he was busy getting drunk with his friends in Lao PDR. The judgement that the crossings did not necessarily have to take place at the quasi-state checkpoint was related to past experiences that the trip would not be stopped. Also,

³⁰ *Yammong* is the activity when the fishers check the nets left overnight in the middle of the river

past experiences related to Ken knowing a few state officers on both banks of the river. The officers knew he is a fisherman and provides boat services in the area. Therefore, he likely has friendly encounters with them either in the middle of the river or on the piers in the two national territories.

However, there were times in the past that Ken had bad experiences with state officers active in the area, and these were not completely omitted from Ken's temporal interpretation. Whenever state officers are stricter, he justifies his presence by committing to state *chronos*, claiming that he is a fisherman with Thai citizenship, and fishing is allowed as long as no permanent equipment was used. Ken's temporal interpretation when crossing the border shows time as of an in-between nature and is negotiable in the borderlands. As I joined Ken's fishing activities, I could see that past, present, and future were presented in relation to Ken's everyday mobility and were not always controlled by state *chronos*. This does not mean, however, that Ken's temporal practices are completely independent of the state's *chronos*. Often decisions are made based on a combination of *kairos* and *chronos*.

Temporal elements at the Mekong River occur when the *Thai Ban* interpret the border and complete border-crossings as part of their everyday lives. The border-crossings may be explained by *kairos* in that, a *Thai Ban* makes a judgement to cross related to his/her past experiences and their anticipation of what is to come. This temporal dimension is kairoic because it is related to the temporality of nature that is not easily controlled by the state.

5.3.3 Negotiations between the state's *chronos* and *Thai Ban's kairos*

Thai and Lao state officers in the area know that the *Thai Ban* such as Ken cross the border at will without resorting to the formalities of or biopolitical management by the state. Although the 1926 Franco-Siamese Treaty allows some flexibility for people who fish to cross the thalweg, Kens' crossings are not always about fishing. Often, he crosses to visit family and friends. Similar subversive acts can be observed related to other *Thai Ban* boat-owners in the area. State officers seldom check whether they cross to drink with friends or to stay overnight on the other side of the river.

On some occasions, reshuffles of state officers along the border cause problems for the *Thai Ban* as new officers are unfamiliar with the local practices and are not aware of the commonality of border-crossing activities. Strict chronotic state timetables are therefore imposed by new officers as they see the river as the marker of the end of state time and believe that people's mobility is allowed only through formal checkpoints and quasi-state checkpoints based on the local administration timetable. Those who cross outside the nominated times are regarded as deviant and have to be policed. These temporal interpretations are different to those of the *Thai Ban*. Once, I heard Ken complaining about him being stopped by a Thai naval officer in the middle of the Mekong. On that day, relating to his past experience, Ken expected his movements back and forth across the Mekong border to be uninterrupted. However, the newly-appointed naval officer applied the law strictly, and Ken's journey was stopped by the temporal junction of the state's authority. Ken explained his everyday practices, and he was allowed to continue his usual routine. This clash of Ken's kairotic time with the state's chronotic approach means that to proceed, he needed to continue his daily routine of border-crossing, and he explained this to the newly-appointed officer. Despite the 1926 Siamese-French Treaty allowing fishing on the condition that no permanent fishing equipment is installed, the new naval officer may have feared that Ken was involved with drug-trafficking activity. During the wet season time of my fieldwork, a number of drug dealers were arrested. Therefore, the newly-appointed naval officer stopped a number of fishers who crossed the border.

One strategy that Ken always employs in dealing with the conflict caused by his 'grey' everyday activities between *kairos* and *chronos* was to refer to acquaintances in positions of authority. Ken and his wife (described by the Thai census as a Lao migrant) once owned a restaurant on the banks of the Mekong but, due to his wife's legal status, decided to sell it to a civil servant who worked in the Department of Fisheries some years before my fieldwork. I asked why he sold a successful business but he and his wife simply said there was a plan by *Ban Dan Khong Chiam* administration to change the pathway on the Mekong bank into a park and administration planned to demolish their restaurant building. Ken's wife legal status made it difficult to negotiate legal matters concerning land ownership. The temporal

flow of Ken and his wife's career in running the restaurant for tourists stopped because they anticipated a possible temporal junction to the continuity of the business that may have arisen from negotiations with the local administration. Again, a temporal dimension, drawing on Lindroos (1998), was revealed as past, present, and future became interrelated. Ken and his wife thought about their past experiences regarding difficulties in negotiating about legal matters with the Thai state because of her statelessness. They anticipated that to sell it to someone in a position of authority and work under their quasi-protection benefitted them the most. Therefore, they sold the restaurant. Consequently, his wife became an employee in the restaurant that she and Ken used to own. At the time of my fieldwork, I saw that Ken's family was disappointed that the construction plan to create a park had not been (or maybe never will be) implemented. They explained to me that Thai national politics (possibly the 2014 coup) had changed government policy and the local budget, and the park plan was delayed and may have been revoked. Nevertheless, selling the restaurant to someone in the Department of Fisheries had some benefits. First of all, Ken had someone in a position of authority to support him when his kairotic everyday practices were policed by Thai state officers from other departments. Informal conversations during the fieldwork reveal the common practice of the *Thai Ban* that mentioned of a known person in a position of authority sometimes leads to reconsideration and/or suspension of the investigation of an alleged illegal action. Also, Ken sometimes sold fish to the new owner of the restaurant. Ken's movements across the border may not only have been related to fishing but also involved drinking and family visits. On occasions, he brought relatives from Lao PDR without documents to look for jobs. Ken's relationship with his acquaintance who became his employer from the Department of Fisheries helped his kairotic schedule co-exist with the *chronos* of the quasi-state timetables. These negotiations allowed Ken and his family to combine the state-centric *chronos* and the *Thai Ban's kairos* attached to the natural dynamics of the river border. The interrelation of *chronos* and *kairos* found in Ken's interpretation of time was of an in-between nature, and pluralities of border-crossings can be observed as it is a Third Space in terms of temporality.

5.4 Negotiations between *chronos* and *kairos* at quasi-state checkpoints

The timetables for crossings quasi-state checkpoints were ambiguous. During the first days I arrived at the field, I was told by Ken that the people from *Bane Maysingsamphane* were expected to cross the border to *Ban Dan* on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays from 08.30 to 16.30. However, as I spent more time in the field, different people told me different timetables. I asked a number of officers and villagers and some said it was between 08.00 and 17.00. This was because there was no written document. I tried to ask the local officers for the document regarding this timetable but the conversations were diverted to other topics. I consulted with another researcher, Soimart Rungmanee, whose doctoral thesis was published in 2014 (University of Sydney) regarding the crossing at Thai-Lao quasi-state checkpoints in *Mukdahan-Savannakhet*. She said that the document was confidential and she had no access to it either (Rungmanee, 2017, personal communication,).

Accordingly, the border-crossings depended significantly on contextual judgement of when and how to cross the border. Therefore, this section explains the relationship between *chronos* and *kairos* practised in the border-crossings through quasi-state checkpoints and the areas adjacent to them. Rungmanee said that quasi-state checkpoints “loosely adhere to legalised immigration practices and formalities,” and added that borderlands are “grey areas between legality and illegality” (2016, p. 221). Indeed, they are blurred areas between *chronos* and *kairos* as well. People’s mobility shaped and was shaped by the state attempt to control time of the border-crossings but because the timetables were not always strictly conformed to, and those who made crossings had to interpret when, where, and how to cross. Sometimes, some people such as boat-owners and those who shopped in the Thai village benefitted from the timetable so they conformed to it. However, some subverted this timetable, such as those who sought jobs in the area with access to better economic opportunities in *Ban Dan*. I define the judgement to conform to *chronos* as kairotic moment. It is the moment where temporal negotiations take place, and it is not the frozen time as in state *chronos* practised at formal checkpoints. Most people who made crossings outside the nominated time

anticipated interruptions by those, such as some state officers, who followed the logic of state *chronos* and practised it with them. This tendency of kairotic moment by which people both conformed to and subverted the timetable led to the temporal pluralities in this borderland as a Third Space. *Kairos* and *chronos* co-exists, similar to the co-existence of people's mobility with the practice of territorial boundary.

This section provides three examples to highlight the interplay between the *chronos* and *kairos* of the border-crossings of the local *Thai Ban*. Firstly, the example of my crossing as a non-local is employed to support the argument that only the *Thai Ban* can cross the border according to local temporality perceived as kairotic by the centre of the state. I crossed the border outside the nominated time one day and was stopped and questioned by local Lao police officers. Therefore, if a non-*Thai Ban* (me) crosses the border outside the nominated time, the chronotic timetable of the state will be practised. The judgement of local officers is very important as they assess when and to whom chronotic time of the state should apply. Secondly, the Third Space is an in-between space that contains state chronotic timetables and the kairotic time of the *Thai Ban's* way of life. The line that separates *chronos* and *kairos* is not clearly defined as repeated kairotic border-crossings may become legitimate among the borderland *Thai Ban*. This argument is supported by the example of an undocumented female labourer who crossed the border through a quasi-state checkpoint but overstayed. Thirdly, the judgement of local officers is crucial in the imposition of strict chronotic time but there are times that local officers yield to specific policies of the centre of the state, such as a military operation against prostitution and drug-trafficking. In this sub-section, I highlight the arbitrary and contingent practices of temporality that lead to the blurred feature of legality and illegality. Certain types of kairotic flow, such as drug dealings and prostitution, are subjected to more intense policing than checking undocumented labourers at restaurants and textile manufacturing houses.

5.4.1 *The practice of the chronotic time of the Thai Ban*

When crossing the border via a quasi-state checkpoint, there is no police check by the states on the departure pathway in Thai territory. During my time in this borderland, my journey was kairotic when I crossed the border outside the

nominated times scheduled by the local administration when not accompanied by a member of the local *Thai Ban*. For example, in the afternoon of a hot summer day at an early stage of my fieldwork, I crossed the border through a quasi-state checkpoint at around 16.30 with a local participant but the Lao officer in charge on that day had gone home. A lady on duty to collect fees of newcomers from Thai territory was still there so I paid her the boat fee but I was not asked to pay the personal fee of entry to the village. The payment of the fee was not recorded. No receipt was issued. In terms of time, my journey may be judged as kairotic and exceptional if attached to a strict state interpretation as my past experiences involved crossings at the formal checkpoint at *Chong Mek-Phonethong* and other checkpoints at the airport. Going through a quasi-state checkpoint was a new experience and I was not sure about the outcome. However, Ken, who volunteered to show me around the villages on both banks of the Mekong that day, ensured that I would be safe if I went with him. Ken, using his past experiences in relation to the anticipation of the near future, was certain that not conforming to state timetable or local administration timetable was not a problem if I, as a non-local, accompanied him. The lady who collected the fee knew Ken and may have assumed that I was a tourist who Ken was taking sightseeing. There may have been a Lao officer at the pier that day and they may have decided to omit all the formalities practised at quasi-state checkpoints, mainly that it was too late to cross at that time (after 17.00). If there was no officer there, the lady could have phoned them that a tourist arrived outside the nominated time. Yet, no Lao officer came to check and asked to see my ID card. The lady, however, welcomed me and asked for money. There were a few cafes near the quasi-state checkpoint. Here people sat, sipped soft-drinks, had meals, and chatted. Ken told me that when something unusual occurs, some of these people usually phones the officer in charge. Ken explained to me by comparing to what usually happens on the Thai side. This process between the local *Thai Ban* and local officers also occurs in Thai territory in *Ban Tha Phae*, the *Thai Ban* informs the police if something unusual occurs. Going back to the pier in *Bane Maysingsamphane* that day, the *Thai Ban* who sat in the cafes near the pier noticed my arrival but, because I was accompanied by a local who was well-known, they probably did not inform the officer. This differs from another later visit to the Lao village without Ken.

Several weeks afterwards, state *chronos* was applied to me as a non-local when I went to *Bane Maysingsamphane* by boat at 06.00 (outside the allowed time for crossings) on a Buddhist Holy Day³¹. On this occasion, I was not accompanied ashore by Ken as he was in a hurry to catch fish. I did not anticipate any problems as in the previous week Ken and I had arrived in *Bane Maysingsamphane* at about the same time on a regular basis. I looked around the village, explored the prices of various foods and other items, and went to make merit in the temple. I felt the *Thai Ban* in the café staring in a strange manner. This may have resulted from the fact that I did not cross the border according to the quasi-state timetable set by the local administration. I expected my time on this trip to flow without any temporal junction because I had crossed the border in the same manner several times before with a local *Thai Ban*. I expected that my journey to be considered normal by the locals. The temporal flow of my journey on arrival was continuous, and there was no temporal junction. However, on the way back, slightly before noon, I was stopped by a Lao officer. To the officer, I was not a local and had crossed the river before the nominated time, and, as a result, my identity needed to be checked. The officer asked me my name, place of birth and work, and reason for the early arrival. I answered that I was a teacher on the other side of the river, and he allowed me to proceed. The investigation lasted about fifteen minutes, and seemed like an eternity to me because I did not know what was going to happen. I answered carefully so that the officer understood, and he eventually let me go.

The police's investigation of my trip to *Bane Maysingsamphane* that day is testimony that chronotic logic of the state never disappears, especially for non-locals. A similar situation was experienced by Donnan and Wilson (2010) at the Hungarian-Romanian border in the early 1990s. Locals were allowed to cross the border but non-locals were directed to the official checkpoint 15 miles away. At *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*, members of the *Thai Ban* are able to cross the border at any time and are not policed, but my crossing outside the nominated time was judged

³¹ Border-crossings in the area have little to do with the Buddhist Holy Day; *wan phra* in Thai and *wan sin* in Lao. The locals tend to go to the temple on the river bank where they are currently living. For example, my participants from Lao PDR came to find jobs in Thai territory. It did not mean that they went back to the temple on the Lao side on holy days. Instead, they simply went to the temple on the Thai side. They were already in Thai territory and it was easier to walk to the temple rather than having to wait for the boat to cross.

according to the chronotic time of the state. The temporal negotiation took place as I attempted to reveal my attachment to the local scene as a teacher at the school on the other side of the river and the familiarity with the boat-owner who took me there. This attachment to the local scene indicates that I belonged to the mixture of local chronotic and kairotic rhythms. The Lao officers tried to impose the state timetable on my crossings but I tried to remain with the local temporal ways.

5.4.2 In-between nature of *chronos* and *kairos* time in the Third Space

When the *Thai Ban* cross the border, they embrace the quasi-state channels as well as the attached temporal practices. They sometimes abide by the quasi-state's chronotic timetables and return by 17.00 but, on occasions, attracted by economic and/or social activities, they overstay and their visit become kairotic. Because of the lack of a clear-cut line to separate *chronos* from *kairos*, I argue that the in-betweenness of the borderland is not only spatial, as discussed in the previous chapter, but also temporal.

This sub-section uses an example of Lek, Ken's relative from Lao PDR, and her mixture of chronotic and kairotic temporality. In an interview, Lek identified herself as a 22-year old Lao female who entered Thailand for work reasons via a quasi-state checkpoint two years before my fieldwork. She saw the Mekong as the route for transport, saying that "the Mekong is important because it is easy to travel anywhere."³² Her use of this checkpoint meant that she committed to its chronotic timetable as it helped her find a better paid job. Lek did not have her name or details of her entry recorded by the local administration. Her temporality may be compared and contrasted with those undocumented labourers on the Thai-Lao border at *Mukdahan-Savannakhet* (Rungmanee, 2016). Rungamanee (2016) found that normally, villagers did not report undocumented Lao labourers' overstay situations to Thai police and Thai officers generally ignored their presence in return for assistance in the detection of trans-state drug dealers. Nevertheless, the undocumented Lao labourers who overstay have to be careful not to be arrested and this extra-

³² This sentence can be transliterated in Lao as '*paisai masai man ko ngai*'. The interview with Lek took place on 31 July 2016.

carefulness contributes to the kairotic nature. This *kairos* of the undocumented labourers was observed because their overstaying may be regarded as exceptional according to the definition of Hutchings (2008). However, Rungmanee (2014, 2016) argued that these overstay is common in the area and widely practised, making them licit despite their illegality. Arrests of overstaying labourers are an example of kairotic temporality but they rarely happen.

At the Thai-Lao border of *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*, Lek may have been known by relatives living in Thai territory for some time and the local *Thai Ban* may have been aware of her presence due to the small sizes of the riverine communities. She accepted that she crossed the border illegally for improved economic opportunities in *Ban Dan*, and had stayed with Thai citizen relatives for two years. Her temporal rhythms are a mixture of *chronos* based on her original entry via a quasi-state checkpoint and may be *kairos* due to her continued undocumented status. However, as she continued to overstay in Thai territory, as did other undocumented Lao labourers in the Thai villages, the grey area of her temporality between *chronos* and *kairos* plays out. The judgement to overstay by Lek is not a linear temporal process because she related the past experiences of other Lao citizens who had overstayed and were not policed. In accord with her relatives who had stayed in Thai territory before, she anticipated that her overstay would be ignored by the Thai officers. The temporal dimension involved past, present, and future, and was related to Lek's temporality before the kairotic moment was put into practice.

Even though Lek was confident that her undocumented overstay was fine and she would not be policed, she had to be careful from time to time. Her situation was sometimes difficult as she had entered the country illegally and was not fully protected by Thai law. In June 2016, she found a job at a textile mini-factory. The industry was designed for local *Thai Ban* to make traditional cotton garments for sale to tourists and was organised by a member of the board of the tourist committee in *Khong Chiam*. Lek worked from 08.00 to 17.00 with members of her family and earned 6,000 baht per month, more than she earned in the restaurant when she first arrived in Thai territory. Lek's vulnerability was evident on occasions, for example when she was asked to ride a motorbike to shop at *Ban Dan* Municipal Market. This was a risky venture for an undocumented worker who had no recourse to the police

for anything that went wrong on her shopping trip, such as being robbed and/or raped. Once, Lek was requested to go to the shop after dark at around 19.30. She was about to walk to the grocery but her Lao relative who had been in Thailand longer than Lek scolded her for being careless, saying that Lek may be raped, and told her to take the motorbike instead. I understood that when people from Lao PDR made informal border-crossings, they were open to abuse by Thai citizens as the law did little to protect those who were undocumented labourers.

Lek's kairotic example is in the in-between nature of border-crossings. The pluralities of temporal practices may be used as an example to support the argument of Hutchings (2008) that *chronos* and *kairos* are not totally separated and the temporal dimension is not linear. Hutchings proposed highlighted 'heterotemporality' which emphasises pluralities of the world political times. Similar kairotic moment is also evident with other Lao people who overstay but their judgement to overstay or move back and forth differs.

5.4.4 Temporal dimensions in blurred legal and illegal situations

Serious policing was evident in the cases of entrants involved in drug-dealing and prostitution. Regarding drug-dealing, casual conversations with both Thai and Lao officers, especially in June and July 2016, indicated that the Thai officers are concentrating on arresting drugs-dealers from Lao territory. A Thai officer told me in an interview, when the recorder was off, about plans to arrest drug-carriers, and a Lao officer told me how worried he was that a villager from *Bane Maysingsamphane* was arrested by the then newly-appointed Thai naval officer. In relation to prostitution, the human trafficking clean-up on 16 December 2015 had a significant impact on people's lives in *Khong Chiam*.³³ Tourist numbers dropped by 50% after

³³ Human trafficking is the movement of persons by means of deceit often holding them in captivity for illegal economic purposes as defined by the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The term clean-up refers to concerted activity by state law-enforcement units to counter such unlawful activity. National News Bureau of Thailand used the term crackdown.

the shut-down of more than 40 karaoke bars acting as brothels (Thai Public Broadcast Service, 2015)³⁴.

Examples similar to Lek's experiences in Thailand highlighted issues of the blurred nature of legal and illegal situations in the Third Space of borderland areas like *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*. The temporal dimension is revealed in this blurred relationship. Undocumented labourers who cross the border need to relate past experiences to anticipate the outcome of their overstaying that they would not be arrested. Some border-crossings may be undocumented but are regarded as licit in local practices, meaning that the activity is accepted in the area despite its illegality. Past experiences of this practice being accepted and the person's anticipation of not being prosecuted are major factors.

The Third Space is described by Abraham and Van Schendel (2005) in terms of legal matter that legality and illegality are blurred in the everyday practice of the borderland people. What the centre of the state defines as legal might not be licit in the borderlands if those activities are commonly practised. Therefore, simply being attached to the legal documents promulgated by the centre of the state is insufficient in the analysis of the Third Space (Abraham & Van Schendel, 2005),

Many transnational movements of people, commodities, and ideas are illegal because they defy the norms and rules of formal political authority, but they are quite acceptable, "licit", in the eyes of participants in these transactions and flows. To categorise between illegal and licit practices, a qualitative difference of scale and intent between the activities of internationally organized criminal gangs or networks and the scores of micro-practices that, while often illegal in a formal sense, are not driven by a structural logic of organisation and unified people

One of these common licit practices is the overstaying of undocumented labourers. Since Lek worked at a restaurant and textile factory, local Thai state officers

³⁴ This figure of 50% drop of income was calculated by a *Thai Ban* interviewee which could be an exaggeration. However, most interviewees who were entrepreneurs agreed that their income dropped significantly.

pretended to turn a blind eye to her undocumented status, similar to the findings of Rungmanee (2016) at *Mukdahan-Savannakhet*. Rungmanee (2016) found that local checkpoints were in operation on the condition that people recorded their names and paid 5 baht per entry from 04.00 to 20.00. Overnight stays were not permitted. Those Lao people who worked as farm labourers often overstayed, sleeping in small shelters or accommodated by their employers. These transgressions were generally ignored as local officers concentrated on liaising with communities in the detection of drug-smuggling. Evidence from my fieldwork shows that prostitution is an issue requiring '*urgent attention*', leading to an increased focus on people working in nightlife businesses compared to people like Lek working in restaurants and factories.³⁵ The temporal dimension regarding the so-called '*urgent attention*' of the state can be explained by the fact that people in the area relate their past experiences with their anticipation of what would come in the near future. Those involved in the nightlife business on 16 December 2015 need to be extra-careful and try to conform to the state *chronos*. For example, there was a karaoke bar in which the Lao employees had to obtain work permits so that they would not be arrested. They expected to continue their business so they conformed to what the state required.

Undocumented labourers in other business sectors continued their overstay situations because their past experiences told them that they would not be strictly policed. For example, Lek's experiences were accepted by locals as licit according to the grey area of legality and illegality of Rungmanee (2014) and Abraham and Van Schendel (2005). To identify the temporal dimension of this, Lek's blurred legality and illegality resulted in her blurred kairoitic and chronotic temporality. Her overstay in Thai territory started the first night she set foot on Thai territory and did not return as required by the local administration of *Ban Dan*, and her status became kairoitic. However, uncertainty may arise because the decision depends on the Junta in

³⁵ The Junta in Bangkok decided what was urgent. The 16 December 2015 was the night of the royal cremation of the late Buddhist Supreme Patriarch. It was therefore a justification by the Junta to arrest karaoke bar employees and owners, by the joint operation of military and civil officers stationed outside *Khong Chiam*. They were ordered to operate the arrests specifically for this matter. In Thai-Lao culture, it is taboo that karaoke bars are open on the day Thai citizens are supposed to be mourning. I was informed of the details in a casual conversation with a few karaoke bar-owners and military sergeants in the area from June to July 2016. They did not sign consent forms.

Bangkok. For this case, the Junta simply judges that prostitution should be policed, and Lek worked in a restaurant so she was not policed. If one day, the Junta decides to police undocumented labourers, Lek may be arrested and her temporality may have to be re-interpreted based on a new policy of the state.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the pluralities of the temporal practices of the local *Thai Ban* when crossing the Thai-Lao border at *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*. I have argued that the chronotic time of the state and kairotic time of the *Thai Ban*'s ways of life co-exist and cannot be separated. Therefore, the pluralities of time are practised by people who live in the borderland and their everyday practices contribute to the in-between state of the Third Space. Conformity to the time of the state or not depends on the people's past experiences and their anticipation of what comes next. Then, the judgement is put into practice and this is the kairotic moment when the past, present, and future are interrelated. On occasions, the *Thai Ban* are committed to the chronotic timetables of the quasi-state checkpoints controlled by local administrations but, on other occasions, they follow the more kairotic local temporal practices based on the natural dynamics of the Mekong. There are three features of the ways in which these chronotic and kairotic practices shape each other in the locals' border-crossing activities. The first of these features is that the centres of the states, in this case Bangkok (Thailand) and Vientiane (Lao PDR), are not the only actors who control time regarding border-crossings. At the formal border checkpoint at *Chong Mek-Phonethong*, around 30 kilometres from the fieldwork area, biopolitics and disciplinary practices of the state are evident as modern technology controls the time of those who cross the border. The equipment, mostly CCTV cameras and computerised systems, record the details of border-crossings. Even in the area of non-formal checkpoints, the state *chronos* is practised in terms of everyday rituals in formal education institutions.

The second feature differs from the first as it presents the different interpretations of the Mekong River border that give rise to a variety of temporal dimensions. Members of the *Thai Ban* regard the Mekong as a life space for catching food and as a means

of transport. The state sees the Mekong as the natural border between Thailand and Lao PDR. However, because most state officers know it is impossible to stop border-crossings at all places at all time, they turn a blind eye to the people who cross the border outside the nominated time scheduled by the local administrations of the border villages. Also, the state officers expect the local *Thai Ban* to co-operate in surveillance of other issues, such as drug-trafficking and cross-border prostitution. Only rarely do state officers challenge the *Thai Ban* indulging in personal temporal judgements and crossing the border, such instances sometimes being the result of newly-appointed officers unfamiliar with local practices or changes in policy of the central state government. Temporal negotiations take place between these persons who have different approaches to time, relating their past experience with their everyday practices and judgement. The local members of the *Thai Ban* eventually are able to continue their lives in this borderland area.

Thirdly, I have analysed the interplay of the state's perspective of kairotoic time that shapes and is shaped by state and quasi-state timetables in the interpretation of the borderland *Thai Ban*, especially when border-crossings are negotiated at the quasi-state checkpoints. Very often, the states' approach is used by locals who follow kairotoic practices as they benefit from the existences of the quasi-state checkpoints, but at the same time they frequently suspend regulations by overstaying in the host country's territory and travelling outside the limits of the allowed areas. Reasons for such transgressions may be economic, because Thai territory offers more economic opportunities, and also social, as the *Thai Ban* visit their families who live on both banks of the river. Sometimes, the local *Thai Ban* and local state officers play a crucial role in the judgement, relating to experiences in the past, about on whom and when the state chronotic interpretation is imposed. This may be explained by my case as a non-local who crossed the border outside the nominated time of 08.00 to 17.00 on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, leading to questioning by a local officer. On that occasion, the chronotic time of the state was applied to me, while other members of the *Thai Ban* were able to cross the border without difficulty. Sometimes, local officers had to conform to policies from the centre of the state, such as cross-border prostitution and drug-dealing. These three features contribute to the temporal pluralities of the everyday practices of the *Thai Ban* in regard to their border-crossings at *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*. The temporal interpretation and

practices of the *Thai Ban* in the area reveal the in-between state of the Third space in this borderland.

As the past, present, and future are inter-related and the temporal dimension is explained as non-linear, kairotic moment plays a crucial role in people's subjective judgement regarding time. Another related issue to the temporal pluralities in border-crossings is political subjectivities, and the negotiations of these are examined in more detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 6 - Negotiations of political subjectivities: Pluralities of border-crossings on the Thai-Lao Mekong border

6.1 Introduction

I have shown in the past two chapters the contribution of the spatial and temporal practices at quasi-state checkpoints that make border-crossings between Thailand and Lao PDR. The hegemonic nature of the spatial and temporal interpretations based on sedentary assumptions of state-centric interpretations shapes and is shaped by the political subjectivities of the *Thai Ban* who cross the border every day. Two features of political subjectivities may be noted. First, the spatial and temporal practices at the quasi-state checkpoints at *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* testify that the *Thai Ban* do not have to rely on the formal checkpoints established by the state to make crossings. Secondly, a variety of meanings of the Mekong River, mainly as the marker of territorial space and as life space, further helps produce a variety of political subjectivities when different groups of people meet. The *Thai Ban* embrace, reject, subvert, and make use of the river border depending on the encounters and contexts. As stated in Chapter 2, some studies focussed on spatial and temporal negotiations, and negotiations of political subjectivities, but these three have not been analysed together in regard to border-crossings at quasi-state checkpoints. This chapter focuses on the negotiations of political subjectivities at the quasi-state checkpoints and non-checkpoints to complement the discussion of spatial and temporal negotiations.

Accordingly, this chapter deals with the third sub-research question of this thesis that asks *What are the ways in which the political subjectivities of the Thai Ban at the Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun border are negotiated and how do these ways contribute to the pluralities of everyday border-crossings?* The question is further divided into three sub-questions. Firstly, it asks *What are the ways in which the natural terrain of the Mekong River border contribute to the formulation of the political subjectivities of the Thai Ban in their everyday engagement with the river?*

The discussion of this question reveals that the natural terrain used by the state as territory is not the only meaning that contributes to political subjectivities of the people who engage with it. The different practices of spatial and temporal interpretations lead to different political subjectivities, determining how a subject positions him/herself in relation to the border. Drawing on poststructuralists, one makes the meaning of oneself that contextually depends on relationships with others. It results in the political subjectivities being spatially and temporally defined, depending on when and where the encounters take place. Since the borderland is an in-between in regards space and temporality, the political subjectivities of an individual are even more ambiguous and flexible as shown in this chapter.

Secondly, the chapter asks *What are the ways in which the political subjectivities of a Thai Ban villager are negotiated in the engagement of everyday border-crossing along the Mekong River border?* In this section, I show how political subjectivities of the *Thai Ban* in the area are ambiguous. Through the quasi-state checkpoint, when border-crossings are made, the *Thai Ban* encounter state officers in both Thai and Lao states. The strategies to present themselves vary on these occasions. Some claim to be Thai nationals with Lao ethnicity, anticipating that this helps their journeys back and forth over the river. The self-presentation of being Thai or Lao varies and is flexible depending on the contexts and purposes.

Thirdly, it asks *What are the ways in which the political subjectivities of a state officer are negotiated when the state officer interacts with the pluralities of everyday border-crossings at the Mekong border?* I illustrate that varied political subjectivities are not only noted among the *Thai Ban* but also in state officers expected to represent the centre of the state and ensure that the border is the line drawn to separate two national spaces³⁶. I argue that the conceptualisation of the state officers is a mixture of the Mekong River as a life space and as territorial space at the same time. Other possible meanings assigned to the river emerge as the border-crossings take place daily.

³⁶ As discussed in the previous chapter, a political subjectivity is rather strategic and not fixed. A state officer can be a merchant, a business entrepreneur, a father, and a teacher. To provide a brief generalisation, a state officer cannot be a *Thai Ban* if the term *Thai Ban* refers to the people who rely on subsistence economy unless that officer stops representing the state authority, for example, being retired or having stopped receiving salary from the central government.

Academic literature, such as that of Sirikrai (1984) in International Relations (IR), Pongern (1998) in Political Science, and Santasombat (2008) in anthropology, recognised that informal contacts existed along the border, even during Cold War days. In a research report funded by the Institute of Asian Studies, Pongern (1998) completed an analysis of border trade between Thailand and Lao PDR. The report stated that from 1988 to 1997 there were three permanent checkpoints along the 1835 kilometres of the Thai-Lao border.³⁷ Local border checkpoints defined by the Thai government (Pongern, 1998, p. 50) were justified as the policy-makers of the Thai and Lao states were aware that the centres of the states were unable to control all the people's movements all the time, especially the movements of those with cross-border kinship ties. Pongern (1998) identified four plans to improve Thai-Lao relations after the conflicts of the Cold War and following the then Thai Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan's famous quote of *turning the battlefields into the market places* (Erlanger, 1989). This was the beginning of some recognition by the centres of the Thai and Lao states of the quasi-state checkpoints.

This kind of checkpoint is in operation in the borderland of *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*. As discussed in Chapter 4 on spatial negotiations, there are two boat associations known as *khiw*. The western pier is opposite the District Hall of *Khong Chiam*, while the eastern pier was next to the *Khong Chiam* Buddhist Temple. The western one receives people from Lao PDR on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays and allows Thai tourists to go to Lao PDR every day. The eastern one, however, does not accept people from Lao PDR. Only Thai tourists are able to use this channel to visit the Lao village on the other side of the river daily. The formulation of political subjectivities in relation to the symbolic meanings assigned to the Mekong are analysed through the quasi-state checkpoints run by local administrations.

6.2 Political subjectivities: The *Thai Ban* with a variety of meanings of the Mekong

³⁷ Paribatra (2013) said the length is 1810 kilometres. The matter is still debatable.

Political subjectivities are shaped by how one individual interprets space, time, and relationships with others. Society plays a role in defining individuals. This indicates that an individual partly accepts the role assigned by society but is not passive and always trying to engage with that identity. The process of self-identification is never finished. This endless process of political subjectivities is defined by Howarth (2013) as mirror stage effect. As discussed in chapter 3, it is the self-identification when a subject attempts to fulfill what he/she wants to achieve in a society (Howarth, 2013). Political subjectivities are thus contextual in this borderland as a Third Space where spatial and temporal interpretations are parts of the in-between state. In the borderland, the political subjectivities of individuals are even more ambivalent than in other scenarios. This section accordingly employs the example of one of my participants, Soi, 36, a former Lao citizen who is defined by Thai census registration as a Lao migrant. Soi has various political subjectivities because her everyday activities were engaged with the pluralities of border-crossings along the Mekong River border. As do other *Thai Ban*, Soi interprets the Mekong as the territory that divides two national spaces, a lived space to catch food, a means of transport to her birthplace villages, and even a terrain of spiritual serpent god – the Naga. With such different interpretation and engagement with the river border, Soi's political subjectivities change depending on when, where, and how she chooses certain sets of meanings assigned to the Mekong River in the encounters with others in her everyday life.

6.2.1 Various political subjectivities and meanings assigned to the Mekong River border

Soi is Ken's wife and was born in a village on the same river bank of the Thai village *Ban Tha Phae* in which she was residing at the time of the interview. However, her birthplace village is in Lao PDR, and the trip from the village she resides at the moment to her birth place village is separated by the national boundary of the *Dong Rak* Mountain Range. Soi was a Lao citizen before her citizenship was revoked some years before (I did not ask the reason for the revocation because I was letting the conversation flow during the interview). In the fieldwork, Soi's political subjectivities were related to the everyday meaning-making process as proposed by Lefebvre (2002) and Howarth (2013). Also, her meaning-making process of relating

herself with the Mekong border can be explained by the ways in which she presented herself. What a subject takes into consideration for self-conduct is morally conditioned and was described as “a set of values and rules of action” which influences and is influenced by the “family (in one of its roles), education institutions, churches, and so forth” (Foucault, 1985, p. 25). Foucault (1994, p. 95) called this “multifarious social relations.” Applying Foucault’s use of the notion of political subjectivities, Soi presented herself as a Thai-Isan person, a Lao, a stateless person, a mother who looks for food in the Mekong islands, a step-sister who provides economic opportunities for her Lao relatives, a boat queue organiser for her husband, a person who claims to have the ability to communicate with the spirit of the Naga god in the Mekong, and an employee at a restaurant she used to own. These different political subjectivities occurred in relation to the four semantic field elements as explained below.

When the element of sign and symbol are used to explain Soi’s self-presentation and her relation to the Mekong border, it shows that the Mekong is not interpreted simply as a natural stream that flows from one place to another. However, when Soi presents herself as a mother who has to look for food to feed her two Thai citizen daughters, the Mekong becomes a symbol of food resources, especially in the wet season (from mid-April to the end of September). This type of symbolic meaning assigned to the river usually happened when Soi waited for fish from her husband and searched the islands in the river for insects from March to April. The concept of mirror stage effect may be used to explain this situation based on the relationship between Soi, her husband, and two daughters at a particular time. Soi defined herself as a wife and a mother. After self-identification as such, Soi practised according to the role of an ideal wife and mother – to follow her husband to the Mekong River because she could not find food by herself and needed her husband to catch fish and pilot the boat. Otherwise, she had to spend money in the community market which she did not always want to do. This further explains the relationship between Soi’s husband and the Thai and Lao officers that he and Soi are allowed to look for food as long as no permanent fishing equipment is installed. This relationship between Soi, her family, and neighbours in the fishing activities can be moreover defined by Howarth (2013) as the process of self-identification in social relations. Similar occurrences among other fishing households in adjacent areas

were observed as sometimes, Soi relatives – both Thai and Lao – came to help search for insects and fish. Then she brought them back to prepare dinner.

In the meantime, the Mekong also functions symbolically as the territory that separates two national spaces when Soi presented herself as the boat queue organiser. Her relationship with other boat owners is that she organises tourists if they want to cross the territorial river to another nation-state. She also arranges the order of who took the tourists first. Every year, as I heard from her, this happens in the Thai and Lao New Year when more tourists came to visit *Khong Chiam*. Soi's self-presentation as a boat organiser is therefore a way to earn income on hot summer days when temperatures reached 40 degrees Celsius. In the summer during the fieldwork, I saw that she was a hard-working mother as she invited tourists to join her husband's boat trip and took care of her 5-year-old daughter who was playing in the area. Soi's various tasks took place at the same time because she also set up a shelter to sell beverages (See Picture 9 on page 153). Therefore, if applying Foucault's concept of self-presentation (1985), Soi's identity as a boat organiser, a beverage shopkeeper, a wife, and a mother happened and changed depending on the contexts and encounters.



Picture 9: Soi's temporary business to sell soft drinks specifically was set up for Thai-Lao New Year. It was located along the walking path by the Mekong River close by the restaurant she used to own. It is

in the same place where she organised the boat queue to cross the border. Her daughter was also playing in the area

The relations between people and natural terrain employed by the state as the border was studied by Flynn (1997) who conducted research in the *Shabe* region on the Beninois-Nigerian border. People who live by the *Okpara* river that separates the two nation-states define themselves as borderland people who very often facilitate other people who want to make crossings. Natural difficulties in wet seasons in *Okpara* impede travellers by truck and on foot. Long-distance traders need local communities' assistance to pass through their area using canoes. The ability to provide assistance then contributes to claims for common self-identification of the border people until they announce that "We are the border" (Flynn, 1997, p. 311). However, my thesis not only focuses on identity which is how meaning of the self is formulated, as Flynn did (1997), but also on political subjectivities which are related to relationships among different people. While Soi positions herself as someone who knows about the border terrain of the Mekong and provides the way to cross it, her positionality changes very quickly when she encounters different persons with different positionalities, such as when she serves at the restaurant close by.

I observed that after the Thai-Lao New Year holidays that lasted three days, Soi set aside her role as the boat queue organiser. She became an employee in a restaurant that sold Mekong fish instead. In this context, the political subjectivity of Soi is that she has to be a good employee in regard to the owner of the restaurant. She is not expected to do anything that may cause problems for the owner, although the restaurant is the place she used to own (see more details in Chapter 5). By that time, she also presented herself as a good step-sister to her Lao relatives, encouraging her younger Lao step-sisters to find jobs in Thai territory. Every day during the lunch break, she invited her Lao relatives, who were undocumented, to bring their lunch packs and eat at the restaurant. It did not appear that the owner of the restaurant was displeased by this. However, by the end of my fieldwork, Soi lost her job as an employee there. The reason was not revealed but the fact that Soi used the restaurant as if it was still hers may have been one of the reasons. The fact that she invited her relatives to use facilities in the restaurant everyday may have been another reason.

As a person defined by the Thai state as 'Lao migrant', Soi's ways of crossing the border differs from her Thai and Lao citizen relatives and neighbours. In regard to her legal status, she is not able to cross the border easily at the formal checkpoint. Therefore, Soi always uses her husband to transport her across the river in his boat. She told me in the interview that:³⁸

We cannot go to the border checkpoint because we have nothing. We must have a card, so we can cross at the border checkpoint. I don't have any. I have been registered with them but I don't have a Thai citizenship. Recently, in 2015, I had To Ro.38³⁹. I have had the To Ro. 38. Yes. It is this To Ro. 38 that I have been carrying with when we go around. I have spoken about this whether I can use such a card to exit this way, and they said no. So, I go home via the Mekong by boat.

Soi's "self-reflection, self-knowledge" and "self examination" (Foucault, 1985, p. 28) revealed that she is labelled as a Lao migrant under *To Ro 38*. These are the persons whose Lao citizenship has been revoked and are 'temporarily' allowed to stay in Thai territory. They are not fully granted the right to travel outside the restricted area, not to mention to cross the border. If Soi wants to travel outside this restricted area, a request has to be submitted to the Minister of Interior, the Provincial Governor, and the District Chief (Saisunthorn, 2012). Therefore, she has to find other means of transport over the river that is defined as territory by Thai and Lao states and separates the village she currently lives in and her birthplace village. Resorting to unofficial routes via the Mekong River does not mean that Soi has never faced other problems. One evening after dinner in May 2016, she told me about her going back to Lao PDR, being harassed by Lao state officers, and being made to pay 200 baht to cross the Mekong without official records or receipt. She explained to the Lao officers that she was going to visit her home and family and, as a *khon lao*, she could go to Lao PDR anytime she wanted (during the conversation, the term *khon lao* was used – this is more neutral than *phonlamuang lao*. The term *khon*

³⁸ Interview with Soi and Ken on 28 June 2016

means *human* or *person* without any indication of citizenship but with an ethnic connotation). In that situation, she was in an inferior position and had to pay 'under-table' money to the Lao officers to proceed.

Being a person of in-betweenness, Soi was unable to define herself as Lao or Thai. She hoped to be Thai because she thought it was more convenient to cross the border with citizenship. Soi answered questions from her relatives about her citizenship by saying that she was neither Lao nor Thai. When I first asked her if she had a Thai identification card, Soi was reluctant to answer and appeared to be embarrassed by the question. Her reluctance may have resulted from the fact that she did not remember the exact name of the centre that issued her the *To Ro 38*. She said that she hoped to become a Thai citizen before she died, satirically using this overstatement as a figure of speech because of the slowness of the Thai bureaucratic process. She was granted the rights for basic health welfare such as membership of the 30 baht health scheme but crossing the border at official checkpoints was still burdensome. Based on Foucault's ideas of self-reference and self-knowledge, Soi still sees herself as a Lao person who hopes to become a Thai citizen if the opportunity arises. When the Mekong is interpreted as a symbol of transport, the Thai territory is also the space for better economic opportunities. Soi always provides places to sleep for her undocumented relatives who overstay. Some manages to live with Soi for a few years without having been policed or deported.

Fifteen years ago, moving from a village on the Lao territory to another Thai village was one step to obtaining a better-paid job. Yet, Soi's citizenship has not yet been fully Thai, though she is no longer a Lao citizen. The relationship between identity and subjectivities may be used to explain this situation. If political subjectivities are the process in which one relates to others in a society, Soi's self-examination influences how she interprets the river and how she treats her family members who live in Lao PDR. The Mekong is a route through which Soi always introduces a better economic space in the Thai village to her Lao relatives. Being under *To Ro 38*, though she is not a Thai citizen, yet she has partially been granted some rights of a Thai citizen, such as access to the 30-baht health care coverage. She only has to pay 30 baht for all kinds of illnesses and services in state hospitals. She told me she used these rights to give birth to her second daughter. Still, she is not allowed to

participate in any election, if and when the Junta steps down from power. Therefore, in terms of politics, as the notion of political subjectivities is used in this analysis, Soi cannot fully participate in Thai politics but she gets some rights of a Thai citizen.

The third semantic element described as signal by Lefebvre (2002) was also noted during the fieldwork. According to Lefebvre (2002, 2003), when one speaks of a symbol in an urban situation, one may mention the street lights that are red, yellow, and green have command functions. Similarly, I argue, the Mekong does not have a direct command function that contains a legal dimension. However, Soi's interpretation in regards to the river and the rain, in the wet season, did show the signal element. Especially when it rained hard, the Mekong indirectly influenced Soi's decision whether to cross or not to cross the border. For example, one day, when Ken wanted to go to drink whiskey with his friends in a Lao village, Soi scolded him for the fact that the level of the river was high and she feared that an accident may happen. She looked at the cloudy sky and said that that was not the time to pilot the boat. In this case, the mirror stage effect may be explained that Soi acted as a wife and in order to have a happy family, the members should not have any accidents. To cross the border at that time was too risky. Ken and the children had already survived a number of accidents in the Mekong.

The Mekong is believed by the *Thai Ban* to be a space where the spiritual Naga serpent god resides, and this influences the ways in which Soi engages with it. This is the time when image as an element in the semantic field of Lefebvre (2002) emerges. The Naga is constructed as pieces of art that gives meaning to people's everyday practices in these riverine villages. Statues of Naga serpent god were observed throughout my fieldwork area along the Mekong River. The god is a spiritual image that gives luck and prosperity when happy and takes lives when angry. The image function of the river influences Soi's identity because very often she defines herself as the body that is housed by the Naga spirit. Therefore, she could communicate with the spiritual world under the Mekong River. The identity of the housed body of Naga as claimed by Soi emerged at the time when the family members were faced with difficulties in the past. For example, one time when I crossed the border with Ken, Soi was afraid that I may be arrested by the police in Lao PDR because I was new to the *Thai Ban* community, so she told me she had to

pray to Naga to protect me. With the notion of the mirror stage effect, Soi strove to get what she and her family lacked, that was the rights not to be exploited by people with state authority. Most evenings, in a casual conversation, Soi told me her story in the past in which she and her family had been exploited by state officers. It was not a surprise at that time when she expected that I may be exploited, she prayed to the spirit believed to reside in the river to protect those she loved.

Soi told me that there was a world under the Mekong, like *Atlantis* in western culture. She said the spirit of Naga was in the stone she prayed with and wanted to stay in the village to protect her and her family. In the interview, Soi said⁴⁰:

In those days, if we talked about festival, we were not allowed to get into the Mekong. For example, the New Year or Songkran in Thai term, we were not allowed to get into the water. We were not allowed to wear red either. It means, when I was a small girl, if anyone in my village wore red, when they reached Bane Samane, you know what happened? Chao Dek Si Lam Taek wanted their life⁴¹. This is a true story. It was a Naga swimming in the river, it did want to eat mortals. One year, it must eat one mortal. Then, I was so small, I was so small.

The phrase ‘we were not allowed to’ refers to the relationship between the mortals – such as Soi and her siblings - and the serpent god believed to be in the Mekong. The mortals, in this case the young children, were not allowed to wear the red colour. I did not ask why the red was forbidden but it may be assumed that it was the colour the nagas in the river were attracted to and they take the lives of those who wear it. This suggests the inferior position of the mortals to the serpent god in the river border. The fact that Soi tried to reiterate that this was a true story was because this supernatural story seems nonsensical and she was afraid that I may think she was crazy. The Mekong, in Soi’s interpretation, is very majestic and is able to support lives by the food in the river provided to mortals and takes lives by the supernatural power of the nagas.

⁴⁰ Interview with Soi and Ken on 28 June 2016.

⁴¹ This is the name of the Lao spirit housed in the Mekong.

What this quote further implies is that a border is not simply a line that separates two states. For the *Thai Ban* like Soi, the river was a spiritual space where the Naga, a mythological serpent god, resides. Some believes that the Naga is able to take people's lives and give luck and prosperity. Five restaurants in *Ban Dan* had Naga statues at the entrances to their buildings for good luck (see Picture 7 on page 110). This worship of the Naga in the Mekong is related to Soi's identity because she identifies herself as someone who is spiritually connected to the river – the housed body of the Naga spirit. Soi's spiritual connection is supported by literature that focuses on the mythology in the Mekong riverine area as studied by a number of anthropologists. Hongsuwan (2011), for instance, argued that the Mekong cannot be viewed as simply natural terrain but also as cultural space as spirits are believed to be housed in the river. A survey of Tai speakers along the Mekong revealed that the river is a product of Lord Buddha and is related to Buddhism in local folk tales. One of the nagas wanted to be ordained by Lord Buddha but was refused as it was not a mortal. However, the story about the origin of the Mekong told a different tale. The nagas were good friends but there had been a conflict over food between two of them. The supreme god of heaven, *Thaen*, came to judge and ordered the two nagas to compete. Whoever was able to excavate the land to the ocean would be the winner and win the food. In the legend of the Mun River, the area of my fieldwork, the story was a little different as the god who judged was not *Thaen* but Indra, the Hindu god (Hongsuwan, 2011). Chang (2017) explained that the residence of nagas is underwater. This was in accord with Soi's oral narrative that the nagas live under the Mekong.

The relevance of Soi's claim to have a spiritual connection to the Naga may be linked with her various political subjectivities. Her political subjectivities depend on the encounters and are political in that on many occasions, she told stories about Thai and Lao territory by alluding to the mythology of nagas to her Lao relatives. Soi, claiming to be able to spiritually connect with the Naga, said that Lao territory as the land of Naga was cursed by the Garuda, the mythological bird, who protected Thai territory. In her narrative, Soi said that the garudas waged war with the nagas and

the former defeated the latter.⁴² Therefore, the Lao nation is always poor and people in Lao territory need to cross the border to Thai territory for economic opportunities. In this case, the political message was presented to Soi's siblings who were undocumented labourers and stayed in her house. In other cases, the spiritual connection attached to spiritual narrative was formulated and presented to international organisations. For example, Agier (2016) examined the political subjectivities of the Hutu who related themselves to the exodus of people led by Moses in the Old Testament. The Hutu escaped civil war in Rwanda in 1994 and were forced to stay in border camps. Agier (2016) stated that these people's political subjectivities arose from social limitations, and displacement due to civil war, and their ability to represent themselves to UNHCR as victims of the civil war. Claiming to have spiritual connection, Soi maintains her superior position to her Lao relatives invited to find jobs in Thai territory. When Soi talked about this mythology, I observed that her Lao relatives were very keen to hear it. To the undocumented female Lao employees, Soi was a powerful person that they respected. One possible reason is that she is the one who encouraged them to come to Thai territory, and another reason was that they stayed in her house safe and sound despite being undocumented.

6.3 The strategic political subjectivities of the *Thai Ban*

The self-identification of an individual in the border is ambiguous, especially when people make crossings through a quasi-state checkpoint. Very often, their self-presentation and identification are strategic in the encounters with state officers of both territorial spaces. Sometimes, they referred to themselves as Lao and Thai interchangeably. In the fieldwork, when a boat operator provided service to cross the Mekong border, the boat was decorated with the Thai national flag. This certainly was related to Thai national territory and the citizenship of the boat operator.

⁴² Every official document issued by the Thai government is rubber-stamped at the top with the emblem of garuda. It was a surprise that Soi's narrative was in line with what happens in the bureaucratic practice of the Thai state in issuing documents with the garuda emblem. Soi was a former Lao citizen and is semi-literate. She therefore rarely had a chance to deal with formal documents as such.

However, when the same boat operator simply cruised the river to visit his friends and family and met Lao officers, he/she presented him/herself as a Lao, with ethnic connotations rather than citizenship, so that they were not arrested for illegal entry into Lao PDR. The floating of self-presentation related to citizenship and ethnicity thus is strategic. This blurred self-presentation therefore needed to be problematised and explained how it is formulated in everyday practice of this Third Space. In this section, I use the example of Ken to illustrate the fact that political subjectivities are flexible when engaging with the border. Also, political subjectivities vary depending on the encounters and where the encounters take place. Ken's political subjectivities are related to the everyday meaning-making process, and his self-conduct is related to his everyday meaning-making process and is morally conditioned. This moral condition expected by society was described as "a set of values and rules of action" as defined by Foucault (1985, p. 25). These values and rules of action were further called "multifarious social relations" when one encounters others in a society (Foucault, 1994, p. 95). Applying Foucault's use of the notion of political subjectivities, Ken could be a Thai citizen with Lao ethnicity, a boat operator who provides service to Thai tourists, and a fish supplier to the Mekong restaurant.

6.3.1 As a Thai boat operator

The political subjectivities of Ken, as a *Thai Ban* boat-owner, are formulated when he took tourists to cross to *Bane Maysingsamphane*. His various political subjectivities in this case are related to his self-identification as a Thai national and also as a boat-owner who was familiar with the natural terrain of the Mekong. The concept of mirror stage effect may be used to explain this situation when Ken tries to continue his routines as a boat operator as it is known by other *Thai Ban* villagers that he knows the Mekong well. He, therefore, performs accordingly by taking tourists back and forth. His boat is usually decorated with the Thai national flag, so the Lao and Thai officers know what nationality the boat operator is. In this situation, Ken presents himself as a Thai citizen. Decorating the boat as such, Ken is certain that he was not arrested by either Thai or Lao officers during his working hours because to transport tourists was allowed by the loose regulations between *Ban Dan Khong Chiam* and *Bane Maysingsamphane* local administrations. The formulation of identity is not one way process of identification. It was not only that Ken himself defined as a Thai boat

operator. On the other way round, the *Thai Ban* in the two villagers in the two nation-states also see him as a Thai boat operator while he is working under the Thai flag on his boat. Howarth (2013) regarded this as two ways of identification between agent and the society.

Another obvious example of Ken trying to present himself as a Thai national happened on a wet day. Ken normally had a couple of boats for different purposes at his personal pier. On that day, Ken used his smaller boat without the Thai national flag for fishing. To his surprise, he was stopped on the river by a newly-appointed Thai naval officer. At that time, there was increased surveillance of drug-trafficking from Lao PDR, a possible reason for Ken being stopped by the officer. On returning home, Ken complained about the interruption to his trip and the fact that he had to inform the officer that he was Thai and fished the river every day. I understood this activity is allowed by the 1926 Franco-Siamese Treaty. Ken did not know about this treaty but he knew there was no problem fishing and crossing back and forth for this purpose. In order to come back home, to bring fish to the family and possibly sell to the Mekong restaurants, he had to present himself as a Thai national. At first, the officer did not believe this because the personal appearances of the *Thai Ban* villagers on both banks were similar, but Ken persuaded him by referring to many Thai officers he knew in the past. He eventually was allowed to continue.

6.3.2. Self-presentation of ethnicity as a Lao person, not a Lao national

Ken's self-presentation is very strategic when crossing the border without going through checkpoints involving encounter with Lao officers. Once, after a long trip to hinterland in Lao PDR by boat, when Ken was asked where he was from, he did not give the full answer but just says he is '*khon lao*', meaning 'Lao person', which refers to Lao as ethnicity. This is true because he was born in *Pakse* which is a Lao city and he had Lao citizenship before it was revoked. I tried to ask him the reason for the revocation but I only got the answer in a half-joking manner that the Lao government told him to choose whether he was Thai or Lao. I have crossed-checked state documents and found out that this was because a couple of years after he moved to Thai territory, the Promulgation of the Law on Lao Nationality indicates in Article 2 that "the Lao People's Democratic Republic does not authorize Lao citizens

to hold several nationalities at the same time” (President Office, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, 2004, p. 1). He avoided answering the fact that he became a Thai citizen and had revoked his Lao citizenship. By giving some small gifts to the Lao officers, they did not bother asking him further questions and let him to continue his boat trip deeper into Lao territory (see Picture 10 on page 164). When he proceeded deeper and encountered unfamiliar Lao officers, Ken always said he was from *Bane Maysingsamphane*, Lao PDR (on the opposite side of the Mekong to *Ban Dan Khong Chiam* in Thailand). This is half-true because he does not reside in *Bane Maysingsamphane* but in *Ban Tha Phae* in Thai territory. *Bane Maysingsamphane* is a village he visits daily because of his work. He is able to be flexible with his political subjectivities to suit his ends. These flexible political subjectivities of Ken reflect the fact that he always befriends as many state officers as possible on both sides of the Mekong River border. Thus, the changing of political subjectivities depends very much on the relationships with others in this borderland society. Especially when this society is a Third Space, the changing is related with various self-presentations that are mixed with such factors as ethnicity, nationality, occupation as a fisher, and village of origin.



Picture 10: Gifts Ken provided to unfamiliar Lao officers when he made deeper crossings into Lao territory along the Mekong. This includes one bottle of local whiskey, two cans of sardines in tomato

sauce, and two tins of pickled cabbage. They are products of Thailand that are more expensive in Lao PDR.

Another academic in Political Science, Tangseefa (2006), whose research is about the borderland, focused on the strategic use of political subjectivities but this use was different to that in my thesis. While he focused on the formulation of group-identity to counter the government of one nation-state, my cases focused on everyday activities that occurred among villages in the borderland. For example, Tangseefa (2006) examined displaced Karen who fled political violence in Burma to the Thai-Burmese border areas and attempted to counter the junta government in Yangon. A common political subjectivity of 'Karenness,' which refers to a group of ethnic minority in Burma, was formulated. Applying the concept of the state of exception and bare life of Agamben (1998, 2005), Tangseefa (2006) said that this displacement stripped the Karen of their citizenship and left them without legal protection. The stories of these people were often ignored because of their statelessness and were devalued as merely noise – *phone* not *logos* (the sound of a non-political actor overlooked by the sound of the political worth listening to). People who repeatedly crossed the Thai-Burmese border faced situations in which they may have been killed at any time, because the warzones between the Karen militants and Burmese soldiers took place in the area adjacent to the camps. It was not only that the Karen in the war zone were not recognised when they told the stories of their flight from Burmese territory. Also, they may have been killed and those Burmese military officers who killed them would not have been prosecuted. Applying Agamben's terms (1998, 2005), Tangseefa (2006) explained that the Karen lives were treated as if they were *zoe*, a Greek term referring to the sheer fact of living without any legal protection. Instead, Tangseefa (2006) said that the Karen tried to present themselves as *bios*, a Greek term for political subjects. The Karen therefore tried to transform their voices to *logos*, not *phone*, so their stories were heard in the international community. In this way, the idea of a unified 'Karenness' was formulated as a strategy to counter the oppressive regime in Yangon. However, there were different groups of Karen who spoke a variety of dialects in the camps. The research by Tangseefa supported the argument of Spivak (1990) that found identities, the self-identification, to be contextual and strategically practised by political actors for their own benefit. Tangseefa reconfirmed that the strategic

production of identity was a way to produce political subjectivities, referring to the ways in which one group positions itself in relationship to others. Then, the Karen made themselves “perceptible and intelligible” (2006, p. 407) so their lives were not bare life in the terminology of Agamben (1998, 2005). In this way, their voices – *logos* – therefore would be heard in the international community.

My thesis focuses on the analysis of two aspects of political subjectivities. Firstly, in the case of Ken, the political subjectivities are not produced by a situation similar to the imperceptibility of the Karen that their speech was *phone*, not *logos*. Ken’s voice is indeed *logos*, not *phone*, as he has Thai citizenship and is legally protected by Thai law. More importantly, despite a number of incidences of abuse by Thai and Lao officers, his current positionalities are powerful to a certain extent in this borderland as he knows many officers on both banks of the Mekong River – at least he is able to ensure that he is not arrested when making undocumented crossings. However, the ways in which he crosses the border in his everyday life still makes him vulnerable in the specific context of encounters with state officials he does not know, and this highlights the strategic use of different expressions of identity. Secondly, the analysis of political subjectivities in this thesis does not involve efforts to counter the government or an oppressive regime as the Karen did in the work of Tangseefa (2006). In my research, the political subjectivities are at the village-to-village level, but it so happens that the villages associated with Ken are located in two different nation-states. He is not attempting to counter the government or an oppressive regime but simply trying to pursue his everyday practices, many of which involved crossing the Mekong, viewed by Ken as a space of life.

6.4 The strategic political subjectivities: State officers in the Third Space

I argue that the flexible and strategic political subjectivities of state officers as political subjects contribute to the pluralities of border-crossings. Political subjectivities emerge when they meet with other people and their practices in the encounter may conform or may not conform to what is expected. On the Thai-Lao border, state officers are expected to conform to state space and time expectations.

However, some state officials sometimes suspend these expectations at official border-crossings and the quasi-state checkpoints at *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*.

This section focuses on the contextual nature of identity and political subjectivity that contributes to the Third Space nature in the borderland. Other literature focused on custom officers, military, and police officers on the Thai-Lao border, such as Walker (1999) who examined the politics among Thai officers from different departments regarding the border-crossings in *Chiang Khong* (Thailand) and *Houay Xay* (Lao PDR), and Rungmanee's analysis of Thai officers regarding undocumented labourers from Lao PDR (2014, 2016). However, those officers are supposed to practise the classical type of state representatives who patrolled the border. This section looks at other different types of officer who are not directly assigned to police the border-crossings. Instead, it examines the political subjectivities of the officer from the Department of Fisheries who has different duties from just patrolling the border-crossings. This officer monitors the fishing especially in the Mun River where it meets the Mekong at the Thai-Lao border.

The identity and political subjectivities of the officer from the Department of Fisheries examined in this section are not fixed. Apart from patrolling the river, he is also the owner of a restaurant. In this case, the notion of floating of meaning of Howarth (2013) is helpful because the meaning of the river floats when he has different political subjectivities. From 08.00 to 16.00, the time of bureaucratic offices in Thailand, he is a state officer. After 16.00 he sets aside his identity of state officer. Approximately at 18.00 he embraces another identity as a chef in his own restaurant. As elaborated in Chapter 4, new meanings assigned to the river border constantly float and endlessly emerge every day. The political subjectivities of this officer also floats in relation to the river and other people he encounters. On the one hand, he positions himself as a Thai officer who is supposed to observe the national territory and supervise members of the fishing community on the river. On the other hand, after his work in the evening, he is the owner of a restaurant located by the Mekong and expected financial benefit from his customers. I consider this floating of meaning and practice of political subjectivities as in an in-between state of the Third Space.

6.4.1 As the owner of a Mekong fish restaurant

Along the borderland of *Khong Chiam*, it is common to see state officers operating businesses, such as restaurants, cafes, and guesthouses. These situations arose partly as the officers are in positions of authority and most people of non-authority who ran a business tended to be exploited by state officers, as I witnessed in the fieldwork. If they were not exploited, they often perceived themselves as of a lower status when there was any legal matter in regard to the business. The purchase of Soi's restaurant by Thawi, 49, a state officer who has owned the fish restaurant since then, is an example of this. As discussed in the previous section, Soi is in a position of a Lao migrant as defined by the Thai census registration. She is not a full Thai citizen. To avoid all political cost due to legal matters, she decided to sell the restaurant to Thawi a few years before I conducted fieldwork⁴³. When Thawi works for the state, he is employed as if he is the state instrument as he polices those who fish with prohibited equipment such as a permanent net. Accordingly, one of his political subjectivities comes into being when he is employed by the state during office hours, so he has the opportunity to interact in a superior position with fisherpersons. However, his political subjectivity changes as his identity as a state officer is temporarily replaced, becoming a chef and the owner of a restaurant instead. His relationship with fisherpersons also varies. Thawi has to rely on these people for the supply of fish. The fact that he is a state officer continues to have consequences in that, at times when he hired undocumented labourers, other state officers directly assigned to police this matter, such police and those from the customs bureau, did not inspect him in the same way that they had inspected as Soi and Ken in the past. The use of his authoritative position and other restaurants hiring undocumented labourers are common practices among state officers.

From Mondays to Fridays, Thawi schedules the restaurant to open at around 18.00. However, on occasions, there are not many customers and sometimes, he has to patrol the river to catch people who use electricity and bombs to catch fish. As a result, the restaurant's operating times are flexible. On Saturdays and Sundays, the restaurant is always open as more Thai tourists are expected from other parts of the country. Lao visitors generally do not eat there as those who cross the border

⁴³ Interview with Thawi on 26 June 2016. Again, Thawi is not his real name.

through these quasi-state checkpoints are *Thai Ban* who rely on subsistence economy. The *Thai Ban* on both banks are not able to afford to pay for overpriced food they could catch themselves from the river. They do not eat in these restaurants but tend to work as employees in such locations.

The notion of floating of meaning concept by Howarth (2013) and riverscape of Sankhamanee (2006) may be used together as they are applicable to explain the two ways in which the Mekong influenced the formulation of political subjectivities. Firstly, it indicates the area adjacent to the river and this natural terrain affects the meaning-making of the people who live there. Secondly, the practice of meaning-making influences the ways in which different people positioned themselves when they interact with the river and with people who interpret the river differently. When Thawi buys fish from the husband of an employee in the restaurant, he is not able to position himself as a state officer who polices and implements the national logic. Instead, Thawi acts as a guarantor for the cross-border activities of undocumented persons who are relatives of the person who fishes the river. The meaning of the Mekong as territory therefore floats and gives way to a space for resources of income. This is because Thawi has to rely on the fisherman whose relatives are and could possibly be his undocumented employees in the restaurant and in other business places in adjacent villages. Certainly, undocumented labourers may have been arrested by local police and officers from the customs bureau. If Soi and Ken had continued to own this restaurant instead of Thawi, they may have been exploited by state officers from other departments.⁴⁴ During the fieldwork, catching illegal labourers was not a high priority for the police and military officers who were more interested in the trafficking of drugs and prostitutes disguised as '*singing partners*' in karaoke bars. However, I often heard complaints that local officers asked for under-the-table money from business entrepreneurs in return for extra facilitation if they had to make any legal contact with the state and protection if something went wrong, such as the restaurant being robbed. If the owners had the authority, state officers from other departments did not ask for such money.

⁴⁴ A business entrepreneur who was happy to be named gave me information that the local officers asked for protection money. However, I will not name him/her but focus more on the given information.

6.4.2 As a state officer at the Department of Fisheries

Thawi's flexible political subjectivities suggested a grey area of everyday practices on the border. On the one hand, the riverscape of the Mekong as a natural space contributes to the attitude that undocumented border-crossings are not a problem as they give people economic opportunities and, as a business entrepreneur, he is able to operate his restaurant with a reliable source of fish and cheap labour. According to Abraham and Van Schendel (2005), these cross-border activities may be illegal in the eyes of the state but licit in the eyes of local people. Thawi embraces the logic of the Mekong as a space to catch food and a route for transport when he came to the restaurant after 18.00 every day. However, during the time at his office Thawi, as a state officer, has to carry the state interpretation regarding space and time assigned to the Mekong as national territory. Especially, at the time of interview, Thawi's views on more serious issues, such as prostitution, were that these involved cross-border activities and were illegal and illicit. His political subjectivities and that of others in the area changed from those of the chef who welcomed undocumented border-crossings to the officer who defended the national territorial integrity to get rid of drug-dealings from the other side of the river. His political subjectivities changes depending on the contexts and contributes to the pluralities of everyday border-crossings in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*.

Thawi knows that Thai and Lao *Thai Ban* cross the border through the quasi-state checkpoints and that many overstay. Although the interpretation of the Mekong by Thawi may be as a space of life that he relies on for fish as mentioned in the previous sub-section, very often the national logic of the river separate states emerges. If applied directly to his duty to police prohibited fishing equipment and practices, Thawi said in the interview that fishers do not care about the thalweg, the international line in the river dividing the two countries, as they go wherever the fish go. As a state officer, he displayed state-centric standpoints consistent with his position. He recognised the Mekong as an international river in which the use of electrical and damaging tools is prohibited. During the period of my fieldwork, I did not see any actions against persons using permanent equipment the Mekong itself, but actions by the Department of Fisheries in the Mun River, in Thai territory close to the Mekong, were evident.

The grey areas of Thawi's attitudes towards undocumented border-crossings were present in the interview. Sometimes, state-centric standpoints were dominant in Thawi's opinions, such as when I discussed the arrest of the hidden prostitution in karaoke bars (an issue outside the authority of the Department of Fisheries). Thawi used to hire a few undocumented Lao female employees. After arranging legal documents for them, they felt more secure and left his employment to work at karaoke bars. Several months before the fieldwork period, there was a big clean-up of up to fifty karaoke bars in *Khong Chiam*, many being charged with human-trafficking offences. The manner in which Thawi talked about his former employees represented the voice of authority of the Thai state. Although he does not have authority to arrest any of them, attitudes towards the sedentary norm and illegality concerning prostitution were present. However, by the time he gave me this interview, I had witnessed the fact that relatives of an employee in the restaurant were in the area. They worked in other places in *Ban Dan* and spent their lunch break time with Thawi's employee. I am certain that Thawi was aware that those relatives were undocumented labourers and overstayed but he did not say anything to his employee for inviting them to use his restaurant as if it was their house. As a good state officer, he would have had to report these undocumented labourers to the responsible department. However, at the same time, he was also a good business operator who expected financial benefit from his restaurant, and maintained good relationships with his employees.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that temporal and spatial negotiations contributed to the flexibility of political subjectivities. Critchley (1999), Howarth (2013) and even Foucault (1985, 1994) recognised the fluidity of political subjectivities in general, but they did not emphasise how spatial and temporal negotiations contribute to this dynamic. In this chapter, I have discussed the third research question of the thesis. I have argued that the political subjectivities of people who cross the border in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* are contextual and not fixed, depending on where and when the encounters among different political subjectivities take place. The production of

the riverscape of the Mekong as a life space and as the territory of the two states comes into play. The fluid political subjectivities of people in the borderland contributes to the in-between state of the Third Space. Given that the focused area is the borderland, the features of the Third Space that shape and are shaped by different people make their political subjectivities even more ambiguous. Pluralities of border-crossings by which the *Thai Ban* embrace, reject, and subvert the existence of the Mekong Thai-Lao border have been discussed in three ways. Firstly, I have shown how the four elements in the semantic field of Lefebvre play a role in the everyday meaning process of my participants. I have further explained how my participant, Soi, identifies herself in relation to the river border and other people. The Mekong River is not simply interpreted as space where the water flows from one spot to another. However, it is interpreted as the line that divides two national spaces. With this symbolic function, my participant is in a superior position when she organises boat queues for tourists who wanted to cross to *Bane Maysingsamphane* in Lao PDR. When the Mekong is symbolically interpreted as a route to transport for better economic opportunities, my participant is also in a superior position as she acts as a step-sister who introduces a better life to her Lao relatives by inviting them to work in Thai territory, despite being undocumented. Secondly, I have shown how the political subjectivities of a *Thai Ban* are very strategic when they are asked whether they are Thai or Lao. For example, Ken who used to have dual citizenship had had his Lao citizenship revoked. When he crosses the border in an undocumented way, and when he encounters Lao officers, he always presents himself as Lao with ethnic connotations. He is fully aware that he is no longer a Lao citizen but in the fieldwork he tried to tell the Lao officers half-truths that he is Lao. On the other hand, when he fished and encountered the checking of the Thai officers, he always tried to refer to himself as a Thai citizen, saying he had the right to fish and go back to the Thai shore, taking the fish home and to sell to the restaurants. The self-presentation of Ken thus swaps back and forth between Lao as an ethnicity and Thai as a citizen. Thirdly, I have shown that the political subjectivities of a state officer in the borderland are always in transition, a characteristic of the Third Space. It is common in the borderland to meet a state officer who owns a restaurant, indicating two political subjectivities. One is that of a state officer who is supposed to carry the meaning of the Mekong as territory. The other is that of a business entrepreneur who expects a profit from his restaurant. The

swapping of political subjectivities is strategic depending on the contexts and the encounters with other people. The third section thus is interrelated with the first and second section as the state officer who is also the owner of the restaurant needs to rely on the family of Soi and Ken for both fish and cheap labourers. Therefore, the political subjectivities as a state officer were not observed when he worked in his restaurant. These blurred forms of political subjectivities as positioned by my participants contribute to the in-between nature of the Third Space in the borderland.

Chapter 7: Discussion of the borderland as the Third Space

7.1 Introduction

In this thesis, I have argued that pluralities of people's border-crossings of the Mekong River border between Thailand and Lao PDR occur every day. The local *Thai Ban* in the borderland of *Khong Chiam* and *Sanasomboun* have their own ways of crossing the border. Spatial and temporal negotiations occur in people's everyday border-crossings and the negotiations formulate people's political subjectivities that change depending on the encounters with others. Sometimes, they reconfirm the state logic of territory but most of the time they suspend that logic and cross the border at will. The different ways of engaging with the border depend on spatial and temporal negotiations and with whom they interact. From a state-centric point of view, the everyday movements of these people with their own modes of crossing are not regulated. The Mekong is an international border but the borderland area of *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* is found to be one example where people's movements across the river border occur daily without formal state regulation. In the empirical chapters, I have accordingly examined the everyday banal pluralities of the *Thai Ban's* border-crossings by employing the three concepts of space, temporality, and negotiations of political subjectivities. In this chapter, the three concepts are woven together to explain the way in which each shapes the existence of the borderland as the Third Space. The spatial and temporal negotiations involved in the border-crossings shape and are shaped by this interpretation of the Mekong as a lived space, state territory, and various emerging interpretations. Different political subjectivities also contribute to the pluralities of the crossings.

Border Studies and Borderland Studies' scholarship has primarily focused on the analysis of spatial negotiations. For instance, Cunningham and Heyman (1994) found that there are pluralities in border-crossings as people who cross have different ways to interact with the existence of national territory. Others, such as Little (2015) and Reeves (2016), proposed that there is excessive focus on spatial

negotiations in Border Studies and Borderland Studies and argued that temporal analysis should also be one of the foci to understand the in-between nature of lives in the borderlands. Others, such as Tangseefa (2006) and Agier (2016), introduced the notion of political subjectivities of those who make border-crossings in the analysis of borderlands to understand that these subjectivities are contextual and strategic to achieve people's expectations, indicating that current literature is already aware that political subjectivities are contextual and not fixed. My thesis adds to the current literature by emphasising that the contextual non-fixed political subjectivities of the people who live their everyday lives in the area contribute to the in-betweenness of spatial and temporal negotiations. I have further argued that the understanding of the Third Space in existing literature can be developed by weaving the three concepts of space, temporality, and political subjectivities together in the analysis of the borderlands at the same time.

In this chapter, I aim to explain the effects of the weaving of these three concepts together on the pluralities of the people who make the border-crossings in the Third Space. Accordingly, the first section explains the use of the analyses of spatial and temporal negotiations and negotiations of political subjectivities in the thesis, and, in addition, outlines the complementary nature of the weaving of the three concepts to other existing literature that tends to focus excessively on spatial negotiations in the borderlands. The consideration of temporal negotiations and negotiations of political subjectivities helps to clarify the blurred picture of the in-between state in the borderlands provided by the sole analysis of spatial negotiations. This presents a more sophisticated framework. True, when border-crossings are made, the negotiation of the interpretation and practice of space takes place, such as the Mekong River as lived space on the one hand and as a territorial line on the other. However, my thesis promotes the theoretical analysis in that the interpretation of this space can also be temporal. Furthermore, the fact that new interpretations of the river border endlessly emerge is an indication that the analysis of political subjectivities is necessary. Different people with different political subjectivities interpret the river border differently. These differences depend on space, temporality, and encounters with other political subjectivities. Therefore, the weaving of the three concepts of spatial and temporal negotiations and negotiations of political subjectivities offers a better explanation of the pluralities of border-crossings.

The second section discusses the application of the concept of Third Space in the Mekong area and elsewhere. I argue that the concept as employed in this thesis applies to the edge of a state at a physical territorial border. However, this section restates my proposal in Chapter 3 that the concept bridges the framework of the two theoretical standpoints in Border Studies and Borderland Studies; topography (the focus on the condition that a border is drawn on the physical edge of a state) and topology (the focus on the border practices that relate to the flow of the people that may take place in a state's hinterland). In addition, this section proposes that the analysis of the Third Space with reference to the specific type of quasi-state checkpoint found in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* be an example for future research throughout the Thai-Lao border. I argue that analysis of the borderland as the Third Space should not only be limited to formal checkpoints as focused of other researchers but needs to include research of other types of checkpoints and areas in which there are no checkpoints.

The third section discusses the limits of the theoretical frameworks of disciplinary and biopolitics of Foucault (1998, 2009) and everyday practice by Lefebvre (1971; 1991; 2000; 2002) employed within the contexts of political practices in western states. I argue that the analyses of biopolitics and disciplinary of Foucault can be useful if applied at formal checkpoints where crossings need to conform to state regulations. However, at quasi-state checkpoints found on both banks of the Mekong border, the Foucauldian analyses seem less relevant. The analysis of temporal negotiations and negotiations of political subjectivities are useful to shed light on the pluralities of people's daily border-crossings. In addition, while Lefebvre's analysis of people's meaning-making process focus significantly on urban space, little consideration has been made of rural areas such as in the borderlands.⁴⁵ The meaning-making analysis of urban space, by Lefebvre (1971, 1991, 2002) was used in the Mekong borderland in this thesis. The semantic element analysis of everyday notion by Lefebvre (1971, 1991, 2002) was employed to analyse the Thai-Lao Mekong border as a Third Space that sometimes the river is interpreted as territory.

⁴⁵ Lefebvre (2000) examined the meaning-making process of the people in the borderland of France and Spain in the Pyrenees. It is in French, not English.

Often, it is interpreted as a lived space. The analysis that other possible meanings also emerge everyday such as the river interpreted as spiritual space adds to the analysis of border riverscape as employed by Sankhamanee (2009). By weaving the dimensions of spatial and temporal negotiations with political subjectivities, such an analysis provides a more nuanced explanation of the pluralities of people's everyday border-crossings along this river border.

7.2 The weaving of spatial and temporal negotiations and political subjectivities

The majority of existing literature on the Mekong Thai-Lao border took spatial negotiations as the major focus, such as the works of Walker (1999), Santasombat (2008), Sankhamanee (2009), and Rungmanee (2014). Drawing on the notions of riverscape and borderscape by Sankhamanee (2009), when the Mekong is employed as the border, other meanings may emerge when crossings are made. In this situation, the Mekong is interpreted as the territory that separates two national spaces, the space for transport and trade, as well as a lived space where people catch food. Yet, as shown in this thesis, I have argued that the analysis of the border should not be limited to spatial negotiations. The addition of two other dimensions of temporalities and political subjectivities provides a better perspective of the pluralities of the border-crossing in the Third Space. In this section, I outline the inter-connections of the negotiations of space, temporality, and political subjectivities in people's everyday practices. This section discusses the inter-relation of the three dimensions in three sub-sections. The first deals with the connections between spatial and temporal negotiations and the aspect of speed when travelling. The second highlights temporality with the focus on personal judgements to deal with actual situations and political subjectivities. The final sub-section outlines the interrelations of political subjectivities and spatial negotiations respectively.

7.2.1 The connections between space and temporality (speed)

The reason for the inclusion of the analysis of temporality to supplement spatial negotiations is due to the excessive focus on space by literature (see Chapter 2).

Chapter 5 showed that temporality matters in the analysis of the borderland and that spatial and temporal negotiations are interrelated.

The interrelationship of space and time was mentioned by not only the classical philosopher Kant (1996), but also by the contemporary geographer Deudney (2006), and scholars in Border Studies and Borderland Studies, such as Little (2015) and Reeves (2016). I have proposed a more nuanced stance as the interrelationship of space and temporality presents a better analysis of pluralities in the borderland. The analysis of temporality can be conceptualised as the focus on speed as found in the work of Smart and Smart (2008) and Mezzadra and Neilson (2013). Another aspect of temporal dimensions is the relations between *chronos* and *kairos* analysed in Chapter 5. However, I firstly focus on the aspect of temporal dimensions related to speed in this sub-section before dealing with the everyday relations between *chronos* and *kairos* in the following sections

The people's judgements of where to cross the border, via formal checkpoints, quasi-state checkpoints, or non-checkpoints, involve different amounts of time. This explains the reason for many *Thai Ban* in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* doing business on the other river bank and not using the formal checkpoint located approximately 30 kilometres away. The judgement of the *Thai Ban* to resort to the quasi-state checkpoints means saving time. While using their own boats or the boat service at the quasi-state checkpoint consumes only a few minutes to cross the Mekong. However, to travel to the formal checkpoint at *Chong Mek-Phonethong* takes at least one hour and incurs a financial cost. Dealing with official documents and negotiations with Thai and Lao officers with whom the *Thai Ban* in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* are not familiar takes more time. Therefore, to make unofficial crossings, either with their own boat at personal piers or through a quasi-state checkpoint, saves a significant time. For certain kinds of everyday activities, the *Thai Ban* may choose the space at which crossings may be made at any time, such as the personal piers in the riverine villages on both banks of the river (see Picture 11 on page 180). I therefore propose the analysis of mobility in tandem with temporality to achieve a better understanding of the pluralities of border-crossings.



Picture 11: Ken's two boats and his personal pier in Thai territory; Thai territory with a couple of buildings, is on the left of the picture, while the islets in the river are de jure Lao territory.

7.2.2. The interrelations of temporal negotiations (the relations between *chronos* and *kairos*) and political subjectivities

The inclusion of political subjectivities is important in the analysis of temporality as it is concerned with past personal experiences. Judgements concerning past experiences shape a person's present decisions and future expectations. Also, the temporal dimension is related to political subjectivities, one's definition of one's political status and relations with others. This is especially true when the judgement is concerned with people's interpretations of time and decisions whether to conform to the times for crossings indicated by the state (*chronos*) or not (*kairos*). My thesis' presentation of interpretations and practices of temporality and political subjectivities progresses beyond the simple focus on speed of movement across formal border checkpoints of the works of Smart and Smart (2008), High (2009), and Mezzadra and Neilson (2013). My study's analysis of the interplay between *kairos* and *chronos* in the *Thai Ban's* modes of border-crossings at quasi-state checkpoints and non-checkpoints contributes in that it provides an examination and understanding of the Third Space, where the ambiguous self-identification and political subjectivities occur everyday. I have shown in the empirical chapters that the analysis of temporal

dimension is important and my thesis could be one of the examples of how temporal analysis is applied in tandem with political subjectivities.

It is not only that temporal dimension has been overlooked in Border Studies and Borderland Studies but also in social science literature as argued by Adam (1990). Temporal dimensions are generally overlooked and objective clock time is assumed in most literature. Adam (1990) argued that time is not objective. However, time conceptualised in clocks and calendars can be both objective and subjective. The indication of date is objectively measured but a particular date of the year contains subjective feelings, as an important event may remind people of emotional events, such as the evening of December 24 to Christians. This fact that the objective clock time is constitutive to subjective interpretation is also found in the borderland of *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*. For example, the fact that the *Ban Dan Khong Chiam* administration allows people from Lao PDR to cross to Thai territory on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturday is subjective. These three days, especially Saturdays, are times of economic opportunities where Lao people can cross the border to have access to a variety of products and weekend leisure. This example shows the link between the objective days of the week and subjective times. Subjective interpretations of time lead to definitions of plurality as *kairos* emerges. By taking chronotic time for granted, mainstream social sciences influenced by natural science fall prey to the trap of treating *chronos* as normal time and downplaying *kairos* as merely a temporal transition in history (Hutchings, 2008). As a result of this attachment to *chronos*, the 'hetero-temporality' defined by Hutchings (2008) as various temporal practices of different people in different parts of the world is overlooked. I propose that temporal practices of people in the borderland are examples of the 'hetero-temporality' of Hutchings (2008) that occur in the in-between space of *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*.

Hutchings (2008) proposed that one should recognise hetero-temporal accounts of world-political time and called for the analysis of how such different sets of temporal practices of different people defined as 'hetero-temporality' shape *chronos* differently. My thesis accordingly responds to the demands of Hutchings (2008). The temporal analysis of the relationship between *chronos* and *kairos* presented in my thesis poses one example of a hetero-temporality that takes place in the borderland

as a Third Space. As analysed, it is the temporal dimension of in betweenness when *kairos* and *chronos* shape each other. My thesis has shown that *kairos* is not conceptualised as an exceptional phase that interrupts the uni-directional flow of chronotic time. Based on the notion of the everyday practices of Lefebvre (1971, 2000, 2002), when time is interpreted by people along the border, kairotic moment means people's judgements whether their mobility may or may not conform to the chronotic timetable of the state. Such kairotic moment depends on the contexts and who they encounter. I accordingly highlighted the crucial role of *kairos* by using the example of pluralities of border-crossings in the Third Space, indicating that *kairos* is not secondary to *chronos* but the two co-exist in these pluralities of the temporal dimension.

Temporal practices that depend on the people's judgement play a crucial role in the engagement of the *Thai Ban* with the quasi-state checkpoints and crossings where there is no checkpoint. Because temporal practices are often subjective, the issue of political subjectivities arises. The fact that the *Ban Dan* and *Bane Maysingsamphane* administrations have the authority to take care of everyday border-crossings of the *Thai Ban* contributes to the setting up of local regulations regarding time that are loosely conformed to. This loose compliance results in the pluralities of the time of border-crossings. In my fieldwork, the blurred nature of *kairos* and *chronos* was witnessed when the *Thai Ban* and local officers had to use their own judgement in particular contexts to make decisions about the application of chronotic time. The local timetables regarding the crossings are applied to some people and not others. In regard to locals known in the community, state timetables were not usually applied. However, for non-locals, such as tourists, crossing the border outside nominated times was generally prohibited. If the tourists were accompanied by locals, allowance was made for them to cross the border outside the timetable, and this made the temporal negotiations more complex and the in-between nature of the Third Space in temporal aspect was revealed. In most cases involving locals, border-crossings were kairotic because the contextual judgement of the local *Thai Ban* was often mixed with the state's temporal interpretation. The endless temporal negotiations were more revealing in situations that involved crossing the border without the use of a checkpoint. In such endless temporal negotiations, kairotic moment came into being in the encounters with people of different positionalities. For

example, a *Thai Ban* boat-owner related his/her past experience that to cross the border at that time would not be stopped by any Thai-Lao officers. Afterwards, that *Thai Ban* anticipated that, in the near future, making a crossing at that time may result in the journey being completed without interruption by an officer. The temporal in-betweenness therefore was revealed because the local *Thai Ban* may or may not conform to the times as scheduled in the regulations related to border-crossings. Such in-between state of temporality contributed to the in-between and flexible state of different people's political subjectivities. This explains why the negotiations of political subjectivities is crucial when temporal dimension is used to analyse the pluralities of border-crossings in the area.

7.2.3. Interrelations between political subjectivities and spatial negotiations

The focus on the analysis of political subjectivities helps the understanding of the complex, flexible, and contextual situation of the in-between nature of people's positionalities. In the borderland, people present their identities and political subjectivities depending on spatial negotiations and who they encounter. The floating of meaning plays a significant role in people's everyday engagements with the river border and such engagements are shaped and shape their political subjectivities. For example, a state officer in the area does not necessarily practise the state-centric interpretation of the border all the time as there are blurred features of legal and illegal border-crossings, as indicated by Abraham and Van Schendel (2005). Illegal border-crossings may be licit if they are commonly practised in the area. This means illegal activities commonly practised are accepted but their illegality still continues. Accordingly, the findings of the empirical chapters 4, 5, and 6 are proposed to be integrated in this chapter to develop the unfinished concept of the Third Space in existing literature. As indicated in Chapter 2, Soja (1996, p. 3) described the situation as a form of spatiality in which the process of transition of "ideas, events, appearance and meanings" occurs. In this chapter, I employ the concept by arguing that the Third Space is not only about shifting in terms of space in the in-between nature of a borderland but other areas such as political subjectivities and how the subjectivities interact with the territorial border also need to be considered.

The flexibility of different political subjectivities can be used to shed light on the pluralities of border-crossings, especially when the meaning of the border floats. As mentioned above, this judgement of where to cross the border shapes the political subjectivities of those who make crossings. This is because many fishing *Thai Ban* are not policed that strictly by Thai and Lao officers in the wet season. Accordingly, those who define themselves as *Thai Ban* in the area are allowed to fish the river freely. Rarely is the strict meaning of national territory considered in relation to the fishers.

However, the river is not always interpreted as a space to catch food. There are times when the river is interpreted as territory which separates two national spaces but the *Thai Ban* who live in the area are allowed to make crossings at will. The political subjectivities of the same *Thai Ban* who fish then turn to become boat-operators who take tourists along the Mekong and across to Lao PDR. In these cases, the *Thai Ban* operators are not stopped by either Thai or Lao officers.

In short, this thesis has shown that people's mobility interacts with the territory according to the state's sedentary approach every day. This is in line with the arguments of Johnson et al (2011). In some areas of the border, it is difficult to cross for some people with certain political subjectivities. At the same time, some people at the same junction can cross the border without difficulty. The *Thai Ban* who cross the border easily at quasi-state checkpoints but are often uncomfortable to cross at formal checkpoints. Meanwhile, as a non-local and researcher, I was unable to cross the border at quasi-state checkpoint outside the nominated time as the *Thai Ban* can do. These examples indicate that the negotiations of space are related with negotiations of political subjectivities.

7.3. The application of the Third Space concept in Border Studies and Borderland Studies

In Chapter 4, I argued that the state-centric territorial interpretation of the Mekong is not the only interpretation to be found. The findings from my fieldwork confirm the work of Nail (2016) that the border is a Third Space. To explain this concept, Nail

gave the example of cutting a piece of paper – this act separates the two pieces of paper but also creates a situation in which the divide is a space of its own. In this way, I confirm that the Mekong does not only separate two national spaces but also forms a space of its own. Therefore, I propose that the recognition of the borderland as the Third Space is important not only at this Mekong Thai-Lao border but also in the analyses of pluralities in other borderlands.

However, it must be noted that the application of the Third Space concept requires the examination of people's mobility in tandem with the meeting point of the physical territory of the states. As indicated in Chapter 2, I employed the concept of the Third Space with the mixture of topography (the focus on the physical territorial border) and topology (the focus on people's mobility). Moreover, I argue that the Third Space concept in this thesis may be applied to other parts of the Thai-Lao Mekong border. Such analysis will contribute to Thai-Lao relations in that people's mobility through quasi-state checkpoints and non-checkpoints are considered more. To miss such border-crossings means missing what actually happens in the everyday lives of people along the 1,180 kilometre long border. This section, accordingly, explains the use of the concept of the Third Space in this thesis when applied to other borderland areas along the Mekong border and in other parts of the world.

7.3.1. Third Space: Combination of topography and topology

The approach of topography was used in the mid-twentieth century and identified borders from the centres of states and regarded them as separators of two states' spaces. Topology, however, was defined in recent Border Studies and Borderland Studies to argue that borders not only occur at the edges of states but may be located at places where contact is made with different groups of people (Coleman & Stuesse 2014). Using a centripetal approach, I have employed the notion of everyday practices of Lefebvre (1971, 2000, 2002) to combine topography and topology to simultaneously analyse people's flow and the physical edges of states. By using this mixture of approaches, I found that borders are still at the physical edges of the state if people's flow management occurs there. With this borderland where quasi-state checkpoints are in operation, the mixture of topography and topology helped me better examine the endless everyday spatial negotiations of

pluralised border-crossings because I was able to examine the formulations of the meanings of space, regarding the river border. I have described the situation in which the meanings assigned to the Mekong changed back and forth from a lived space to a territorial divide as floating, drawing on the terminology of Howarth (2013).

As discussed in Chapter 2, Ludden (2003, p. 1070) called for the need to critique the fact that people's mobility was "secondary" to state boundaries, and proposed that, to understand the world of people's mobility, "intersections of mobility and territorialism" should be the focus of analysis. My thesis has illustrated that people's movements co-exist with the sedentary norm in the form of a territorial state. Indeed, the analysis of the co-existence of people's everyday mobility and quasi-state checkpoints in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* has responded to the call of Ludden (2003). To analyse the co-constitution of people's mobility and boundaries as the practice of sedentarism, I proposed the mixture of topography and topology. Such a combination is appropriate to shed light on the pluralities of border-crossings in the Third Space not only on his Thai-Lao Mekong border but also in borderlands in other parts of the world.

7.3.2. The Third Space: Quasi-state checkpoints along the Thai-Lao Mekong border

The issue of some border areas constructed for some people was discussed High (2009) who argued that the formal checkpoint at *Chong Mek-Phonethong* facilitates tourists and other people with secure social status. However, marginalised people such as labourers from Lao PDR tend to be slowed down at the checkpoint and may even be exploited by state officers. High argued that border checkpoints obstruct the movements of marginalised people.

My thesis adds that the events at the formal checkpoint are true but do not present the situation in most parts of the Thai-Lao border. At the quasi-state checkpoints, only the *Thai Ban*, who may be defined by High (2009) as marginalised if they are making long distance border-crossings, may cross easily. Persons who may cross the border easily at formal checkpoints find it difficult to make crossings at quasi-state checkpoints, a situation I experienced during the fieldwork. Very often, the *Thai*

Ban resort to a particular junction – checkpoints – in their villages with which they are more familiar than to go to the formal ones which are too politically and financially costly. My thesis thus represents another scenario and adds to the situation of border-crossings in relation to the everyday practices along the Thai-Lao border. I propose that this specific type of peoples' management – the quasi-state checkpoints – theoretically supports the occurrence of pluralities of border-crossings and that this is the nature of the endless spatial negotiations that take place in this part of the world.

The analysis of the pluralities of endless negotiations in border-crossings in *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* is an example of the use of a particular case to enrich the concept of the Third Space. In the affairs of the Thai-Lao border, formal checkpoints are not the only venues where people make crossings. The analysis of border-crossings in the area where quasi-state checkpoints exist is important because such areas cover most parts of the 1,810 kilometres of the Thai-Lao border. My thesis not only offers a concrete example of the Third Space as a space of its own that is lived in by people every day but also indicates the process of transition of meaning that people give to the border that is supported by endless pluralities of border-crossings. This transition is not easily explained because the ways in which spatial practices are negotiated are blurred and complicated. I do not claim to argue that, as a result of this single case study, a grand theory applicable to every border in the world may be formulated. With the endless spatial negotiations of the pluralised border-crossings, I argue that a particular case of a border should be a springboard to a common theme which is the concept of the Third Space. As explained in the case of *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* where shifting spatial interpretations are expected, the concept of the Third Space is appropriate to shed light on the everyday practices and pluralities in a borderland where there is no formal checkpoint, especially when the dimension of spatial negotiations, temporal negotiations, and political subjectivities are tied together. The analysis of quasi-state checkpoint is important in that it offers another picture of the Thai-Lao border, instead of simply focusing on formal checkpoints. I therefore call for research on this type of checkpoint in the future in other areas along the Mekong Thai-Lao border.

7.4. The contribution of the case study of *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* to existing theoretical frameworks employed in this thesis

This thesis has significantly employed the notion of everyday practices by Lefebvre (1971; 1991; 2000; 2002). It must be noted that in the initial sections in Chapter 4 and 5, I argued that biopolitics and disciplinary power by Foucault (1998, 2009) are more useful with the analysis of border-crossings at formal checkpoints of *Chong Mek-Phonethong*. I have, however, proposed that to analyse another scenario of border-crossings through quasi-state checkpoints and in the spots with no checkpoints, other frameworks such as the everyday practices of Lefebvre (2002), temporal analysis of Lindroos (1998) and Hutchings (2008), and the examination political subjectivities of Howarth (2013) can be better applied. This section, accordingly, discusses how the theoretical framework has been enriched by pluralities of border-crossings in my fieldwork and how the theoretical reflection from my fieldwork can be applied to other borderlands.

7.4.1 The use of biopolitics and disciplinary power at formal checkpoints

Similar to other literature in Border Studies and Borderland Studies such as Nail (2013), Topak (2014), and Leese (2016), my thesis has offered the picture of the biopolitics and disciplinary power exercised at formal border checkpoints as mentioned. They examined people's mobility controlled by the representatives of the state at the formal checkpoints. For example, Nail (2013) examined the US-Mexican border; Topak (2014) and Leese (2016), drawing on Foucauldian analysis, looked at how people who want to cross from non-EU to EU zones are treated. In an adjacent area to my fieldwork, High (2009) similarly examined how the movements of Lao labourers' are slowed down when the crossings are made, despite not explicitly applying the concept of biopolitics and disciplinary power. Indeed, I have employed the use of the biopolitics and disciplinary of Foucault in this thesis (1998, 2009) in the early sections in Chapter 4 and 5 of how the formal border checkpoints at *Chong Mek-Phonethong* operate. However, as my thesis has argued that the formal

checkpoint is not the only kind of checkpoint. There are quasi-state checkpoints and non-checkpoints where the *Thai Ban* cross the border at will, as I have analysed in the final sections in Chapters 4 and 5, and throughout Chapter 6. In such situations, the analysis of biopolitics and disciplinary power are less relevant.

7.4.2. Semantic elements in everyday practices and political subjectivities

Sankhamanee (2009) employed the analysis of how meanings are assigned to the natural terrain, known as riverscape and borderscape, when this very terrain is used as the territory, in his case study of the borderland in *Chiang Khong-Houay Xay*. Sometimes, the river is interpreted as a space for transport and trade. Consequently, it is interpreted as a lived space in the borderlands examined by Sankhamanee (2009). However, at that same time, the Mekong could also be interpreted as the line that separates two economic spheres of Lao PDR and Thailand. The products of Thailand then would be sold at inflated prices in Lao PDR (Sankhamanee, 2009). Yet, my thesis has pushed the analysis of the combination between riverscape and borderscape of Sankhamanee (2009) forward. In doing so, I have applied the semantic elements of Lefebvre (2002) in people's everyday lives to shed light on the pluralities of border-crossings that new meanings assigned to the river border can endlessly emerge.

My thesis has offered the analysis of everyday practices in the borderland by employing the four semantic elements, sign, signal, symbol and image. Weaving the analysis of spatial and temporal negotiations, and political subjectivities together, I have proposed that these semantic elements contribute to the formulation of the Third Space when border-crossings are made. To supplement the analysis at formal border checkpoints, the everyday meanings analysis have shed light on the pluralities of border-crossings in two domains; endless negotiations of whether the Mekong is interpreted as a lived space or territory and endless new meanings given to the river; and the co-constitution of the Third Space and contextual political subjectivities

Firstly, the spatial interpretations of the river as a lived space and a territorial divide shape people's everyday lives. The ways in which different interpretations of the

Mekong may be observed are described as floating meanings, whereby the significance of the signifier changes constantly in relation to the signified. The Mekong may be both signifier and signified as a space to catch food, a space where the Naga god resides, and territory. The fact that the meanings of the Mekong border float, according to the terminology of Howarth (2013), may be explained by the four semantic elements, sign, signal, symbol, and image, and these overlap at all times daily.

On occasions, the *Thai Ban* on both banks of the river interpret the Mekong as an international boundary over which those with boats transport tourists, charging them inflated prices to carry them from one nation-state to another. This interpretation is common at particular times, especially at Thai-Lao New Year when the water level in the river is low, and the Mekong is interpreted as a sign indicating this low level and the lack of danger associated with the river. In this situation, again, the aspect of political subjectivities and temporal dimension appear. Certainly, the *Thai Ban* know that to cross the border without any formal check at New Year to transport tourists would be fine. However, the persons who make crossings must define themselves as boat-operators so that their trips do not experience any junctions. Rarely do state officers apply the sedentary norm to local boat-operators by justifying their actions by saying that they are *Thai Ban* boat-operators transporting tourists. If tourists from the Thai side cross the border without a local boat-operator, they risk being stopped by local officers.

The Mekong is also interpreted as territory that acts as a symbol of income. To cross the territorial river means to move from one nation-state to another and therefore more expensive boat fares may be charged. Sign and symbol in the semantic field of Lefebvre (2002) thus overlap in this case. On other occasions, the same boat-owners interpret the river simply as a space to catch fish and, in this case, the Mekong is not only a sign as a river or a symbol of space to catch food. The *Thai Ban* as boat-operators become fishers who can roam across the river border on the condition that no permanent fishing equipment is used. The function of sign and symbol co-exist. Moreover, signal functions in the semantic field and plays a crucial role. Seasonal dynamics as part of the temporal dimension play a role in the spatial negotiations of the *Thai Ban* as well. When it rains heavily and the Mekong becomes

muddy, the colour in the river primarily functions as a signal that fishers prepare themselves to catch giant catfish.

In addition, the Mekong becomes a space where the spiritual Naga serpent god resides, and this influences the ways in which the same boat-owners engage with the river. This is the time when the image function in the semantic field as described by Lefebvre (2002) emerges. Statues of the Naga are constructed as pieces of art with meaning in people's everyday practices, and these were observed extensively in my fieldwork area along the Mekong River. The god is a spiritual image that gives luck and prosperity when happy and takes lives when angry. The Mekong as the signifier thus floats between the meaning as a territorial border, a lived space, and a space that the *Thai Ban* worship. This kind of overlap in meaning results in a state of in-betweenness and pluralities of border-crossings.

Although the three ways of interpreting the Mekong as lived space, space of spiritual bond, and a rigid territorial divide of two states were mainly observed during the fieldwork, new meanings emerged daily. In the existing literature in Border Studies and Borderland Studies, Sankhamanee (2009) combined the use of the term riverscape with borderscape, indicating that when natural terrain is employed as a national territory, the meanings of the terrain as a natural space swap with when it is used as the line to separate two national spaces. This happens when border-crossings are made. Sometimes, the Mekong, according to Sankhamanee (2009), is seen as a route for trade by the local people in *Chiang Khong-Houay Xay*, sometimes even to *Luang Prabang* in the hinterland of Lao PDR. However, very often, it can be interpreted as territory that separates two economic spheres – Lao PDR on the one hand and Thailand on the other. Products imported from Thailand to be sold in Lao PDR are more expensive than in Thai territory itself.

My thesis has added to the combination of riverscape and borderscape by Sankhamanee (2009) that in borderlands, especially the area with quasi-state checkpoints, people's new meanings of the river border float endlessly. As a space of in-betweenness, other ways of interpreting the Mekong continue to emerge, depending on temporality and the negotiations of meetings with different people. For some, at a certain time of the day, the Mekong is a space to catch food because they

need to feed their family and/or sell the food in the market. However, if that person encounters a state officer who practises a rigid interpretation of territory, they may change their interpretation of the Mekong and conform with the state-centric interpretation so that their journey may continue. On the other hand, in that same journey, if the state officer in the encounter does not strictly hold the state-centric spatial interpretation, the same boat-operator may continue his/her journey for whatever purpose, without being worried about being stopped. This indicates the crucial role that the floating of meaning plays, resulting in endless pluralities of border-crossings when the meaning of the Mekong Thai-Lao border is formulated and put into practice in people's everyday lives, especially those of the *Thai Ban*.

Secondly, the spatial and temporal dimensions of the Third Space, with the existence of a physical border, shape and are shaped by the contextual political subjectivities of the people who make crossings daily. While authors in philosophy and social sciences have proposed the analysis of a Third Space that is a transition in idea, events, and meaning (Bhabha, 1991; Soja, 1996; Abraham & Van Schendel, 2005; Nail, 2016), my thesis has shown that the borderland has the features of a Third Space where people's mobility and territory as concrete practice of sedentary assumption co-exist. This co-existence shapes and is shaped by people's political subjectivities in the area.

Engaging with the debates on political subjectivities in social science in general, my thesis has shown that the fluid nature of political subjectivities is shaped by the in-between state of the borderland. In positivist social sciences are treated as fixed and independent from society (Critchley, 1999; Howarth, 2013). Meanwhile, poststructuralists counter such an argument saying that political subjectivities vary all the time and significantly rely on relations with other people in a society (Critchley, 1999; Howarth, 2013). Critchley (1999), Howarth (2013), and even Foucault (1985, 1994) recognised the fluidity of political subjectivities in general. However, they did not emphasise how spatial and temporal negotiations in the borderland contribute to this dynamic. I have shown that not only political subjectivities are not fixed and rely on the society one lives in but also how the political subjectivities are flexible by bringing the notions of Third Space and everyday practices to support my argument. The political subjectivities of the people who live in this area are on the move,

flexible, and are shaped by the in-between nature of the spatial and temporal negotiations. In the borderlands, with the existence of state physical boundary and people's mobility, the political subjectivities of those who make crossings are even more ambiguous and contextual than in other scenarios.

In engaging with the debates in Border Studies and Borderland Studies, this thesis has clarified the shifting of people's political subjectivities in a Third Space. Especially, spatial and temporal negotiations play a crucial role in the flexibility of political subjectivities when border-crossings are made in their everyday lives. Certainly, the theoretical reflection regarding political subjectivities in my thesis differs from a number of researchers. As discussed in Chapter 2, others studied the ways in which political subjectivities of those who cross the border are formulated, the topics focused on were about people in refugee camps, people who sought work in another nation-state, and the struggles of those seeking jobs. My research, however, has portrayed how spatial and temporal negotiations shape and are shaped by political subjectivities formulated at quasi-state checkpoints and non-checkpoints along the Thai-Lao Mekong border. In addition, my case focuses on the quasi-state apparatus that loosely regulates people's everyday mobility and operates differently. Meanwhile, people's mobility relies significantly on relations with other people with different positionalities and the dynamics of the natural terrain such as the river. This reliance shapes and is shaped by the regulations of local administrations. Sometimes, the sedentary norm of the state may be strictly practised if the centre of the state intervenes regarding certain issues, especially drug-dealings and prostitution. Spatial and temporal negotiations at such quasi-state checkpoints and mobile checkpoints in adjacent areas thus affect the flexibility of political subjectivities. This means that the feature of the Third Space is present and represents another aspect of the transition of political subjectivities in regard to space and temporality.

7.5. Conclusion

The analysis of spatial negotiations is the primary focus of scholars in Border Studies and Borderland Studies. Cunningham and Heyman (1994), for instances, proposed

that people who cross have different ways to interact with the existence of national territory but their analysis is limited within spatial dimension. Little (2015) and Reeves (2016), proposed that in analysing the condition of borderlands temporal analysis could help achieve a better understanding of the in-between nature in the area where two national spaces meet. Tangseefa (2006) and Agier (2016), meanwhile, analysed the political subjectivities of those who make border-crossings and argued that their political subjectivities are contextual and strategic to achieve their political goals. Therefore, the political subjectivities should not be perceived as static and fixed. My thesis adds to the current literature by emphasising that the contextual non-fixed political subjectivities of the people who live their everyday lives in the area contribute to the in-betweenness of spatial and temporal negotiations. I have further argued that the understanding of the Third Space in existing literature can be developed by weaving the three concepts of space, temporality, and political subjectivities together in the analysis of the borderlands at the same time.

In this chapter, I have discussed the significance of the borderland as the Third Space where the negotiations of space and temporality are constitutive to the political subjectivities and the pluralities of border-crossings. I have also presented the reasons that make these arguments crucial and the study's contribution to Border Studies and Borderland Studies. Firstly, I have presented the argument of this thesis that the weaving of three concepts; spatial and temporal negotiations and negotiations of political subjectivities contribute to the existing literature in Border Studies and Borderland Studies. Never before has any research woven these three together at one time. Throughout the empirical chapters, I have shown that the weaving of the three improving the shedding of light on the pluralities of border-crossings in the Third Space.

I have moreover provided the justification for the combination of the three concepts. When spatial negotiations are analysed, temporal dimensions can be noted, such as where to cross the border. To move from one place – as space – to another consumes time and this is how temporality plays out in terms of speed. Temporal dimensions are additionally interrelated with the negotiations of political subjectivities and that explains why the latter is necessary in the analysis. When one makes crossings, one needs to relate to past experiences whether or not to conform to the

state timetable that allows crossings (*chronos*). Then one has to anticipate the future if one is to conform or not to state-centric timetables (*kairos*). The actual practice of time to make crossings depends on how one defines the relations of oneself with others. Sedentary norm, the norm that expects one to ask for state approval before crossing the national boundary, is practised with some people with certain positionalities at some places some times. With the example of the situation in the area where quasi-state checkpoints exist, the analysis of political subjectivities is significantly important. The *Thai Ban* can cross the border without having to get through the formal border checkpoint, on the condition that they are known in the area. Their trips back and forth over the Mekong border thus would not be stopped. However, as I observed in the field, this uninterrupted flow is impossible for non-locals.

Secondly, I have argued that the application of the use of the Third Space concept in other places is possible. Drawing on the metaphor of Nail (2016), when a paper is cut, the cut not only separates two pieces of paper but also forms a space of its own. Similarly, when space is divided into two, the spatial divide forms a space of its own. This becomes the condition of the Third Space concept. Applying the metaphor to a border, the meeting point of the physical edge of two states is the focus in the analysis in this thesis. As indicated in Chapter 2, the combination of topography, which focuses on the analysis of the territorial edge of a state, and topology, which focuses on the flow of the people over a border, has been employed. Therefore, the concept of the Third Space in this thesis can be applied in other borders on the condition that the physical edge of the state is brought into the analysis. I have further argued that this combination of topography and topology responds to the call by Ludden (2003) that the interaction of people's mobility and the existence of national territory are equally analysed.

With regards to the application of the Third Space in the area where there are no checkpoints and where quasi-state checkpoints are in operation, I have argued that this framework sheds light on other areas of the Thai-Lao border. This is because throughout the 1810 kilometres of the Thai-Lao border, people's mobility interacts with quasi-state checkpoints more than with formal border checkpoints.

Thirdly, I have pointed out the limits of the theoretical framework that has been employed in western border practices but also used in my thesis. Biopolitics and disciplinary power of Foucault (2009) have been employed by scholars such as Nail (2013), Topak (2014), and Leese (2016) but such a theoretical framework can be beneficial only when it is applied to formal checkpoints. I have shown how the framework can be used to analyse the border-crossings at *Chong Mek-Phonethong*, approximately 30 kilometres away from my fieldwork site. However, at quasi-state checkpoints and areas where there are no checkpoints, the *Thai Ban* very often cross the border at will, and biopolitics and disciplinary power of Foucault (1998, 2009) may be less relevant. I thus have proposed that the everyday notion that analyses how people make sense of the borderlands be brought into theoretical reflection, especially as the Mekong border is not only interpreted as national territory. Lefebvre's everyday notion (2002) has been very beneficial in this thesis. The use of the four semiotic elements proposed by Lefebvre (2002), sign, symbol, signal, and image, has supported the weaving of the three analyses of space, temporality, and political subjectivities. This weaving has promoted the combination of riverscape and borderscape concepts as Sankhamane employed in his research (2009). New meanings people assign to the river border float endlessly and the Mekong, as a natural terrain, is not simply interpreted as national territory and a lived space. Other possible meanings endlessly emerge, as long as border-crossings are made.

Chapter 8 - Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This thesis titled *Riverine Border Practices: People's Everyday Lives on the Thai-Lao Mekong Border* has discussed the importance of the notion of the Third Space and its effects on the pluralities of border-crossings in the borderland by weaving together spatial negotiations, temporal negotiations, and negotiations of political subjectivities. The findings in the fieldwork reveal that people engaged in everyday border-crossings in the riverine area do not simply embrace or reject the existence of Thai-Lao territory. Most of the time, the stance of *Thai Ban* people was the mixture of subversion, rejection, and acceptance of the boundary resulting in the sedentary assumption in the form of Thai-Lao territory co-existing with people's everyday mobility. Throughout the thesis, I have discussed the research question that asks *What are the ways in which unofficial modes of border-crossings by the Thai Ban along the Mekong Thai-Lao border are practised in their everyday lives and how can these unofficial modes of border-crossing be theorised as a contribution to existing Borderland Studies?*

To illustrate the importance and complexity of the notion of the Third Space, the borderland of *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun*, an area composed of quasi-state checkpoints as well as mobile checkpoints, was used as a case study. I have employed an ethnographic approach using the four methods of participant observations, interviews, interpreting visual presentations and essay readings to examine the everyday practices of the *Thai Ban* people in crossing the border between the riverine villages in the two nation-states of Thailand and Lao PDR. In this way I have been critical of the often expressed sedentary assumption by showing that people cross the border without much consideration of territory, even though they embrace the logic of territory. In this chapter, I highlight the major findings, their originality, the justification for the conduct of the thesis, and its contribution to the literature in Border Studies and Borderland Studies. The chapter considers the research question in the introductory chapter and assesses its contribution to understanding the pluralities in the borderland. By doing so, the three

aspects of space, temporality and political subjectivities that give the Third Space its character are evaluated. Moreover, I discuss possible future research regarding border issues in respect to the Third Space. While this thesis focuses on riverine borderlands that are the in-between space of the Thai and Lao states, there are other border areas to be covered. The Thai-Lao border is 1,810 kilometres in length and 1,108 kilometres of this length employ the thalweg in the Mekong as the territorial divide. This means that 702 kilometres of land border areas need exploration to ask questions about the dimensions of the Third Space and the negotiations when there is no natural dividing element. In the future, quasi-state checkpoints on land borders may be the focus of research regarding the Third Space in Border Studies and Borderland Studies.

8.2 Summary of the thesis: The importance of quasi-state checkpoints

This thesis contains eight chapters. The first chapter introduced the thesis that provides a general background of the research and justifies the research question. It further justifies the analysis of the Third Space in the provision of a better picture of pluralities and ambiguities of border-crossings in people's everyday mobility that helps advance the existing knowledge of Borderland Studies. The focus on the everyday mobility at quasi-state checkpoints in the border zone is important because firstly it reveals an analysis of this particular type of borderland in the Mekong region where states' attempts to control people's mobility are loosely and casually put into practice. The loose and casual practices at this type of checkpoint show that the sedentary assumption continues in tandem with people's mobility. By asking such a research question, the interplay of the sedentarism and people's mobility is analysed to provide a clearer picture of everyday negotiations in terms of space, temporality, and political subjectivities in the empirical chapter 4, 5, and 6 respectively.

The unofficial modes of crossing of the Thai-Lao border have been mentioned by a number of scholars in anthropology and geography, such as Walker (1999), Rungmanee (2014), Santasombat (2008), and Sankhamanee (2009). The quasi-state checkpoints in *Chiang Khong* and *Houay Xay* studied by Walker (1999) and

Santasombat (2008) have become formal ones by the time I started my fieldwork in 2016. Only Rungmanee (2014) explicitly mentioned the existence of the quasi-state checkpoints that have been updated and scattered along the Thai-Lao border.

Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun was an appropriate area in which to ask the research question as research had not been conducted in the region previously and its geographical location where river and land border meet is unique. Other features that make the site distinctive are the existence of a formal checkpoint 30 kilometres from the area, the *Thai Ban* tendency to resort to non-checkpoints and quasi-state checkpoints in their everyday lives, and the reliance of the *Thai Ban* on subsistence economy.

The second chapter discussed the literature review that examined the pluralities of people's border-crossings. Literature specifically relevant to people's spatial and temporal negotiations was also analysed, along with their different political subjectivities. Research in Border Studies and Borderland Studies has focused on the pluralities of people's political subjectivities and their spatial and temporal engagements with borders, but their focus has varied and the concepts of space, temporality, and political subjectivities that form the in-between state of a Third Space have not been simultaneously involved in the analyses of borders. I proposed a focus on borderland areas and borders as a Third Space separating two states' spaces. When two spaces are divided, the divide forms a space of its own, the Third Space. This Third Space is an in-between space in which no completely separated social divisions can be achieved. The contribution I propose as the advancement of knowledge about borders and border-crossings is that foci on political subjectivities and temporal and spatial negotiations involved in peoples' movements across borders are woven together to highlight the in-between state of pluralities and ambiguities of border-crossings.

Chapter 3 proposed a methodology as theoretical scaffolding consisting of four steps. Firstly, the sedentary assumption was scrutinised to provide the background to my analysis. Secondly, the centripetal approach taken in this thesis was described in detail. Instead of reading the borderland from the point of view of the centre of the state, the borderland itself is taken as the focus. Further, I discussed the particular understanding of everyday practices of Lefebvre (1971, 2000, 2002) and elaborated

the specific understanding of political subjectivities used in this thesis. Last but not least, the methodology section discussed the appropriateness of ethnography, especially participant observations, to answer the research question and to understand the different modes of border-crossing activities from the participants' perspectives. Other methods used to complement participant observations were reading participants' essays, interpreting visual presentations and interviews. Details of participants and the access to the field were also discussed. The research question of the thesis *What are the ways in which unofficial modes of border-crossings by the Thai Ban along the Mekong Thai-Lao border are practised in their everyday lives and how can these unofficial modes of border-crossing be theorised as a contribution to existing Borderland Studies?* was divided into three sub-questions that focused on the three aspects of space, temporality, and political subjectivities.

In Chapter 4, I revealed that spatial practices in the borderland matter because the state's interpretation of particular space such as the Mekong to act as Thai-Lao territory is not the only interpretation. There are other meanings that people who live along the Mekong River put into practice in their everyday lives. This chapter shows that the two sets of meaning co-exist and other new meanings assigned to the river as the natural terrain emerge daily. I first discussed the operations of the formal checkpoint at *Chong Mek-Phonethong*, with the Foucault's concept of biopolitics and disciplinary power (2008, 2009). The findings show that the state's attempt to control space is related to the control of people's mobility, especially at formal checkpoints. Modern technology equipment at the checkpoint are installed to record the information of those who cross and the amount of money they pay as a crossing fee. CCTV cameras are in operation to survey that the crossings are directed in a particular tunnel that leads people from one state to another. Most people who make crossings conform to the state rituals without much difficulty but some find it inconvenient, such as my *Thai Ban* participant did at the time we made crossing. Next, I provided another picture of crossing the border at *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* located around 30 kilometres from *Chong Mek-Phonethong*. The findings show that this is the area in which my *Thai Ban* participant make crossings every day without going through a formal checkpoint, despite occasional encounters with state officers from Lao PDR and Thailand. Because the participant and other

villagers fish every day, they are allowed to make crossings to fish at will. These two steps provided two different scenes of people's mobility that cut across the Thai-Lao boundary. In the third step, I provided the scene of mobility through quasi-state checkpoints run by the local administrations of *Ban Dan Khong Chiam* and *Sanasomboun* over which the Thai and Lao states did not have complete control. To answer the first sub-research question, the analysis of the three modes of border-crossings was appropriate to show that, in the pluralities and ambiguities of these crossings, peoples' mobility and the existence of territory co-exist. The fact that the people's mobility and existence of territory co-existed may be framed to respond to Nail's theory on borders (2016). He argued that in the world of mobility, people's movements are defined as 'flow'. The border checkpoints may be described as 'junctions.' Circulation and re-circulation are when people who are filtered by the junction attempted to pass the same junction. The example of Thai-Lao border in my thesis testifies that flow, junction, (re)-circulation occur in the same area where pluralities of border crossings exist.

While much of the literature in Borderland Studies focus on the border practices at formal checkpoints, whether located at the edges of states or in the states' hinterlands, my thesis has presented the analysis of the border at the quasi-state checkpoints which was a specific type at the Mekong Thai-Lao border. Therefore, I propose that this analysis adds a new set of understanding of people's mobility in the borderland in general. The pluralities of the border-crossings have been highlighted more as spatial negotiations are endlessly negotiated in the everyday mobility of the people in the borderland where quasi-state checkpoints are in operation. This includes the analysis of the meaning people give to the natural terrain used by the state as the border. The findings regarding people's mobility at the quasi-state checkpoints reveal that while the sedentary assumption is not strictly put into practice by the local administrations, it does not mean that the sedentary practices completely disappears. The local administrations of *Ban Dan Khong Chiam* and *Bane Maysingsamphane* are granted authority to run the border-crossings and these are loosely conformed to. Meanwhile, some *Thai Ban* still cross the border without going through the checkpoints as they have access to boats. People regard the Mekong as territory on the one hand and on the other hand as a lived space where people catch food and use as transport. Meanings of the Mekong float, and relations

between signifier and signified changed, depending on contexts. Other possible meanings also exist in the locals' everyday lives, such as the Mekong as space for spiritual terrain as the residence of the Naga, and such a belief influences decisions to cross.

The second aspect of the Third Space was explained in terms of temporality in Chapter 5. I found that, similar to the chapter on spatial negotiations, the state temporal interpretation (*chronos*) is not the only rhythm practised in the borderland as people's actual temporal interpretation (*kairos*) shapes and is shaped by the state temporality. Therefore, people's everyday judgement whether to conform to the state time or not needed to be the focus when everyday border-crossings are made.

In addition, I found that the temporal dimensions of the people who cross the border are not linear but stuttering, indicating that the temporality is not uni-directional as in the past coming first, the present following, and the future coming next. However, past experiences, present situations, and the future anticipation are interrelated when one makes judgements of when and how to cross the border. Therefore, I proposed this temporal interpretation and practice of the kairotic moment in people's border-crossings to be the focus of Borderland Studies. This adds to the temporal analysis in social science in general, as *kairos* tends to be viewed as exceptional time that interrupts the uni-directional nature of *chronos*. The example of the *Thai Ban*'s border-crossings shows that *kairos* and *chronos* shapes each other daily. The members of the *Thai Ban* have to relate to their own past experiences with the anticipation of what is to come in the future, and put into practice decisions to cross or not to cross. On some occasions, they conform to the timetable of the quasi-state checkpoints but on the other occasions, they do not.

In Chapter 6, I found that the meaning of the Mekong floats between being the territory that divides two national spaces and a lived space, and other possible meanings emerge to shape and be shaped by people's political subjectivities. When the river is perceived as territory, the *Thai Ban*'s political subjectivity is defined as, for example, a boat operator who benefits from boat fees to cross an international boundary. However, during the time of fishing, the same *Thai Ban* defines himself as a person who fishes to feed the family and thus crosses the border at will. Also,

people change their political subjectivities in encounters with other people. The everyday relationships when the *Thai Ban* meet other *Thai Ban*, tourists, state officers, and entrepreneurs vary contextually. According to the mirror stage effect, one strives to have what one lacks, identifying oneself in relationship to others and society in the borderland. For example, when a member of the *Thai Ban* wants to cross the border to fish, catching fish means the expectation of food to feed the family and income if the fish is sold at the market. In encounters with state officers who at times check the identity of the people who make crossings, the *Thai Ban* strive to get what they lack by justifying their crossings as a fisher, and therefore the logic of territory is not strictly applied. The mirror stage effect was also used to explain people's relationships as the political subjectivities change depending on the encounters in the chapter. As mentioned, expecting to ensure that family members are fed and to achieve a better economic position, a *Thai Ban* boat owner needs to catch fish in the Mekong and arrange which portions are to be sold and which are to be stored in the household. When the *Thai Ban* boat-owner brings a lot of fish home, the family members are satisfied and regard the fisher as a responsible father. If there is enough fish to be sold, the father becomes a fish supplier in relation to either a fish restaurant owner or customers in the community market. With the political subjectivities as a father and fish supplier, the meaning of the Mekong as a territory is suspended. In the meantime, when the same boat-owner has to provide sightseeing services to tourists, he is responsible in taking them to another nation-state. In this kind of relationship, the boat-owner suspends the interpretation of the Mekong as space to catch food and embraces the national logic instead.

These changes of political subjectivities contribute to the notion of the Third Space that describes the state in transition of meanings, activities, and ideas. The notion of the Third Space then has been developed in this thesis as I provided the example of the interaction of people's mobility with the sedentary world in the form of state territory. In the empirical chapters, the in-between condition was not only described with spatial and temporal practices in the borderland but also was reflected in the political subjectivities of those who make everyday crossings.

In Chapter 7, I reflected theoretically on the notion of Third Space by weaving the aspects of spatial and temporal negotiations with different constructions of political

subjectivities. I proposed that the development of Third Space as a conceptual tool that contributes to the social sciences generally. While traditional scholars in Border Studies examine the role of borders from a state-centric point of view and look at the physical edges of states as peripheral areas (topography), more recent literature has argued that borders may be anywhere, even in the hinterland of states as people's mobility is controlled (topology). Drawing on Coleman and Stuesse (2014), I indicated the contribution of the mixture of the two that helps examine the co-existence of the sedentary assumption of the state and people's mobility. Indeed, in mixing topography with topology, I have responded to the call of Ludden (2003) for people's mobility to be treated as not secondary to the state territory.

In Chapter 7, I indicated why the weaving of the three dimensions of spatial and temporal negotiations and negotiations of political subjectivities is important. I stated that spatial and temporal dimensions are interrelated and this is undervalued by most existing literature in Border Studies and Borderland Studies. As the temporal dimension is shaped by subjective interpretations of time, the aspect of political subjectivities arises – how one positions oneself in relation to others in the community. In addition, I argued that the application of the Third Space concept can be applied not only to the Thai-Lao border where quasi-state checkpoints are in operation but also elsewhere in different parts of the world. However, the existence of the physical edge of the state and the interactions of people who make crossings are important to form the analysis of the Third Space. Moreover, I discussed how the case study of *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* helps contribute to the theoretical framework employed throughout this thesis. I indicated that biopolitics and disciplinary power of Foucault (1998, 2009), employed by a number of scholars such as Nail (2013), Topak (2014), and Leese (2016), are crucial in analysing border-crossings at formal checkpoints as I used them to examine the situation in *Chong Mek-Phonethong*. However, the Foucauldian analysis is less relevant where there are no checkpoints and with quasi-state checkpoints. I have therefore proposed that the semantic elements of Lefebvre (2002) used to examine people's everyday practices be employed to shed light on the pluralities of the border-crossings in the area with similar conditions as in my fieldwork site. With the notion of everyday practices, the in-between state of the Third Space is better clarified.

8.3 Research in the future

The notion of the Third Space that Bhabha (1991), Soja (1996), and Goodhand (2005, 2008) defined as a state of transition in terms of meaning, activities, concepts, and ideas was fundamentally developed when it was applied with the borderland theory of Nail (2016). Nail (2016) went into detail in his explanation of the Third Space as in-between in terms of space and people management over that very space. Nail (2016) argued that the territorial border is not neutral because it is always dynamic. The dynamics may result from the re-drawing of the boundary by the central government of contiguous states and this happens in the meantime with the natural dynamics of the natural terrain that changes the border, such as the thalweg in the river. I add to Nail (2016) that people who live in the borderland also draw and re-draw the border everyday in the process of meaning-making, especially when the river is used as territory. Nail (2016) proposed three concepts to explain border situations. Flow refers to people's mobility, junction refers to a checkpoint, and circulation refers to people's repeated attempts to cross the border. I use the case of people's everyday mobility in the borderland of *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* to add to Nail's theoretical stance (2016) that the three concepts may exist in the same Third Space area.

Promoting the notion of the Third Space, I have woven the three concepts of space, temporality, and political subjectivities to respond to the research question that asks *What are the ways in which unofficial modes of border-crossings by the Thai Ban along the Mekong Thai-Lao border are practised in their everyday lives and how can these unofficial modes of border-crossing be theorised as a contribution to existing Borderland Studies?* I have shown in this thesis that *Khong Chiam-Sanasomboun* is the area of in-between state, an important characteristic of the Third Space.

Pluralities of border-crossings are present in this borderland in terms of spatial and temporal negotiations. Spatial and temporal practices monopolised by the state are endlessly shaped and shape people's mobility in the area where quasi-state checkpoints are in operation. Different political subjectivities are also constitutive by the spatial and temporal negotiations. With the example of this in-between space, I therefore conclude that people's mobility co-exists with the sedentary assumption of the state in the form of territorial boundary.

Drawing on the above broader analysis, there are two aspects that I plan to develop in the analysis of the Third Space that focuses on the in-between nature of pluralities at border-crossings. First, the Thai-Lao border is 1,810 kilometres in length (Paribatra, 2013), of which 702 kilometres are a land border. This thesis focuses on the pluralities of border-crossings in a riverine area and the Mekong plays a significant role in the meaning formulation of people's practices. In the future, I aim to look at other areas which are land-based in which a river does not exist and quasi-state checkpoints are set up in relation to mountainous areas. Second, this thesis focuses more on Thai territorial space in the borderland area. In the future, I plan to conduct research that focuses more on mobility that originates from Lao national territory. This is important methodologically as to conduct research in Thai territory is related to my positionality as a researcher. Most participants saw me as a Thai national and my social status was the only difference that may have been a barrier in the establishment of trust. Because the social context on the Thai side was more familiar to me, I may have overlooked some important issues in people's everyday practices. If I conduct research that originates from the Lao side, more cultural differences in relation to my positionality are to be expected because I am not a Lao national.

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Annexes

Annex A – List of interviewees

- Acting former military officer, acting member of civilian-military joint cooperation in the arrest of drug trafficking, and officer at the Center of Nursery Development – Ban Dan, Thailand – **Ban Dan Khong Chiam Administration**, 20 June 2016
- A bru speaking female student, Khong Chiam Witthayakhom School, Ban Dan, Thailand, 25 June 2016
- A hotel general manager, **a five-star hotel**, Ban Huay Mak, Thailand, 27 June 2016
- A person under *To Ro 38* and a former Lao citizen, **a local fisherman and local boat operator at the khiw of the east pier**, Khum Pak Mun, Ban Tha Phae, Thailand, 28 June 2016
- A masseuse, **a local massage parlour**, Ban Dan, Thailand, 28 June 2016
- A waiter, a five star hotel, Ban Huay Mak, Thailand, 1 July 2016
- Two local entrepreneurs, **a local coffee shop**, Ban Dan, Thailand, 3 July 2016
- A Thai-Lao speaking female student from a fisherman family, **Khong Chiam Witthayakhom School**, Ban Dan, Thailand, 4 July 2016
- A former Lao citizen, **a local boat operator and fisherman at the khiw of the east pier**, Khum Pak Mun, Ban Tha Phae, Thailand, 5 July 2016
- A local entrepreneur, **a local goldshop**, Ban Dan, Thailand, 7 July 2016
- Acting state officer, **Department of Fisheries**, Ban Dan Khong Chiam, Thailand, 9 July 2016
- A local entrepreneur, **a local garage**, Ban Dan, Thailand, 25 July 2016

Annex B – Interview Guide

Example of interview questions

These questions are addressed to business entrepreneurs and members of the fishing community. It is assumed that participants cross the Thai-Lao border everyday.

1. Peoples' conceptualisation of the Mekong
 - a. What do you think about the Mekong? Is it important to you?
 - b. What do you think about the wet and dry season? Do these seasons make any difference to your everyday routines?
 - c. What do you think about the people on the other side of the river? Do they matter to your life at all?
2. Thai Ban vs. state practice
 - a. Do you know of any cross-border activities that Thailand regulates? Does Lao PDR have the same regulations? Are there any activities that are important to your community that the Thai government prohibit?
 - b. What do you think about the cross-border activities that the state prohibit?
 - c. Do you visit Lao PDR only for business or also for other activities? Which business activities do you engage in?
 - d. Which cultural cross-border activities do you engage in regularly?
3. Seasonal dynamics
 - a. What is the difference when you have to cross the border when you fish in the wet and dry season?
 - b. What is the difference when you operate your business in the wet and the dry season? For example, do you have more employees in the dry season compared with the wet season.
 - c. What products do you normally trade in the wet season and are these different products to those you trade in the dry season?
 - d. Where is the market? Is the market located differently in the wet and dry season? Do you see different peoples trading depending on the season?

Annex C – Example of participant sheet leaflet

Participation Information Sheet Leaflet

Riverine border practices: People's everyday lives in the Thai-Lao Mekong Border กิจวัตรประจำวันชายแดนแม่น้ำและผืนดิน ชีวิตประจำวันของผู้คนชายแดนไทยลาวบริเวณแม่น้ำโขง

Synopsis:

The study describes how the everyday lives of the peoples along the Thai-Lao border are conducted. The Mekong has been used as a boundary that separates the two countries. Borders are political constructs; laws are made determining cross-border exchange. These laws assume that nothing changes. However, peoples along the border do not always conform to how the Thai and Lao government prohibit or allow mobility. The international border between the two countries is ambiguous because of seasonal dynamics. Hence, it is ambiguous where the border is and very often peoples who fish the river just go fishing without regard to laws governing international boundaries. The way in which peoples living along the border have kinship and cultural ties that lead to cross-border activities based on seasonal changes such as dry and wet season will be presented.

เนื้อหาของงานวิจัย

งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้กล่าวถึงวิถีชีวิตของผู้คนตามแนวชายแดนไทยลาว รัฐบาลไทยและลาวได้ใช้แม่น้ำโขงเป็นเหมือนเส้นพรมแดนทั้งที่เส้นพรมแดนเป็นแค่สิ่งที่มนุษย์สร้างขึ้น ทั้งตัวกฎหมายได้เป็นเครื่องมือในการกำหนดการข้ามพรมแดนของผู้คน และกฎหมายก็คาดหวังว่าสามารถควบคุมการเคลื่อนที่ของผู้คนได้เสมอ อย่างไรก็ตามผู้คนสองฟากฝั่งไม่ได้ปฏิบัติตามที่รัฐบาลไทยและลาวกำหนด ไม่ว่าจะอนุญาตหรือไม่อนุญาตให้ข้ามหรือไม่ให้ข้ามพรมแดน แม้แต่เส้นเขตแดนไทยลาวตามกฎหมายระหว่างประเทศเองก็ยังมีคลุมเครือโดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งเมื่อฤดูกาลเปลี่ยนจากฤดูฝนเป็นฤดูแล้งทำให้ร่องน้ำลึกเปลี่ยนอยู่ตลอดปี เมื่อเป็นเช่นนี้ พื้นที่ที่ผู้คนใช้ดำเนินชีวิตประจำวันไม่ว่าจะเป็นการประมงจับกลุ่มเครื่องตามไปด้วย งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ได้มุ่งนำเสนอวิถีชีวิตที่ผู้คนข้ามเส้นเขตแดนโดยมีความสัมพันธ์ทางเครือญาติและเศรษฐกิจแทนที่จะยึดติดจากกฎหมายของรัฐเพียงอย่างเดียว

Participants

The participants include a number of male and female high school students aged between 17-18, members of the fishing community, and local business persons and potentially others not yet identified. All participants are informed of the objectives of the research and the nature of their contribution to the study.

ผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัย

ผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัยประกอบไปด้วยนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมทั้งชายและหญิงอายุระหว่าง 17 ถึง 18 ปี สมาชิกในชุมชนชาวประมง ผู้ประกอบการธุรกิจในพื้นที่ ทั้งนี้อาจมีผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัยเพิ่มเติมซึ่งยังไม่ระบุในตอนนี้ ผู้วิจัยจะแจ้งวัตถุประสงค์และลักษณะของงานวิจัยขึ้นนี้ให้ผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัยทุกท่านได้ทราบดังปรากฏในเอกสารฉบับนี้

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