

**Being a Burmese migrant in Thailand:
experiences and perspectives of migrant workers**

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Social Sciences

Leiden University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Global Ethnography

August 2019

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Acknowledgements

Throughout my life as a student many people stood behind me and encouraged me to carry on my work. I am very thankful to my parents for their support and insights over the years without which none of this would be possible. I am deeply grateful to Erik de Maaker for his supervisory role and guidance. I thank Sarah Hinman and Jasmijn Rana, my former supervisors in LUC, for guiding me to Leiden University. During my stay in Thailand, many people assisted and facilitated my research. My data-collection in Mae Sot would never been possible without their help. Samak Kosem helped me conduct fieldwork by introducing me to his contacts in Mae Sot. Micho, as a focus group discussion expert, was of great help thanks to her wise advice. I received tremendous assistance from Nicolas Durier and Khun Bhee in approaching various groups of people and communities in Mae Sot. I am also indebted to Naw Sweet who was willing to lend a hand by helping me translate many interviews. The help which Burmese migrant workers have given me in my research cannot be overemphasized. Though I cannot name them I am thankful for their willingness in sharing their experiences. In conducting fieldwork, I received financial support from the Leiden University Fund. This financial assistance was crucial in carrying out fieldwork with financial stability. I am also thankful to Leiden University for providing me with an education throughout my years in the Netherlands. Lastly, I once again express my heartfelt gratitude to my family. I hope my effort can begin to pay back the great patience and love they have given me.

Chapter 1: Introduction

I was born in Mae Sot in 1990 and lived there until 1993 when my family moved to Chiang Mai as there were no international schools in Mae Sot. Every break with my mother and siblings we would go back to Mae Sot where our father worked. As a child who has visited Mae Sot numerous times I never thought much of the large numbers of Burmese populating the town. To me there was nothing out of place about how they visibly outnumbered the Thai inhabitants of Mae Sot. When Thai social conventions were taught to me I learned of the various forms of hierarchy I needed to be aware of, namely that in Thai society one's position and social status was determined by age, profession and geographic location. While by no means an absolute or formal hierarchy there was at the very least an understanding of how the “upper” levels viewed those on the “lower levels” of their respective hierarchies. Elders expected respect from their juniors, city dwellers perceived inhabitants from rural areas as less educated and the local hill tribes were portrayed in the media as backwards outsiders. Within these hierarchies migrant workers from neighboring countries like Burma¹, Laos and Cambodia occupy the lowest rung. While I did not know as a child why this was so I would argue today that it is a combination of their otherness, historical attitudes and narratives towards these neighboring countries, and the low paying jobs they occupy which are generally considered undesirable by Thai society such as construction work, factory work, farming or domestic work. In the case of Mae Sot people of Burmese, Karen, Shan and other hill tribes were more visibly present than any other border town I had visited yet many were also “invisible” in the eyes of the state. It was normal to hear of people without papers crossing the river separating Thailand and Burma looking for work or refuge from the Burmese military. By crossing the border without using official channels and documentation the Thai state does not officially know the names of some migrants, their addresses or even of their presence in Thailand.

After finishing my Bachelors in the Netherlands in 2016 I returned to Thailand and noticed that the town had developed into a city and seemed much busier with numerous construction sites spread around and, more importantly, even larger numbers of Burmese migrants. The increase in population size of Burmese migrants in Mae Sot is in line with a broader trend in which the overall number of migrant workers in Thailand, of which approximately 87% come from Burma, has doubled over 5 years from 1.3 million in 2011 to 2 million in 2016 (UN Migration Report; 2011 and 2016). To an extent the population

¹ *The use of “Burma” over “Myanmar” in this paper is not meant to be a political statement. It is simply the term the author has always employed to refer to the country. When the term “Burmese” migrant worker is used this refers to all the peoples of Burma including both the dominant Burman ethnic group and the ethnic minorities from the nation.*

change can also be attributed to the election of Aung San Suu Kyi Ki in 2012 which was considered the landmark moment that signaled change to the Burmese and other countries. Sanctions were lifted, foreign direct investment flowed in and trade between Burma and Thailand increased of which the majority flows through Mae Sot. To boost trade Thailand's government focused on a series of measures including the introduction of quick work permits and Special Economic Zones to increase the number factories and people who can work there. In my mind questions began to emerge: Why does Mae Sot have such a significant migrant population? Why is Mae Sot the most important border trade town? What are the causes of its rapid economic development and how will it affect and transform the migrant population of this city? These questions became the basis of this thesis.

A. Historical and Ethnographic Outline

Mae Sot is a city located in Tak province of Thailand which shares a border with Burma. Due to its location on the border itself the city has long been a historical destination for traders, economic migrants, refugees and political activists (Lee, 2011). The porosity of the border between Thailand and Burma has been frequently and consistently mentioned by researchers over the years (Pyne, 2007; Lee, 2008; Meyer, 2014; Kukusabe, 2016). On a daily basis numerous individuals travel back and forth across the Moei River from Burma to Thailand for work legally and illegally. Local authorities on either side of official border crossings in Mae Sot do nothing to obstruct the flow of people and goods crossing the Moei by boat illegally in front of them. In local parlance — whether in Burmese, Karen dialects, Thai or English — “over the bridge” and “by boat” are synonyms for crossing the border, in the one case “officially” and the other “informally.” (Balcaite, 2016: p.889). I myself have crossed the border by boat numerous times as a child when accompanying my parents in their visits to clinics on the other side of the border. The long and narrow boats, sometimes piloted by migrant children no older than 10, waited until a customer, clinic patient, or clinic staff needed to cross and would charge 10 baht (0.28 euro) per crossing. The boat and pier on the Thai side of the border is owned by a Thai citizen and the crossings were done daily under the gaze of nearby Thai border patrol officers indicating a degree of acceptance.



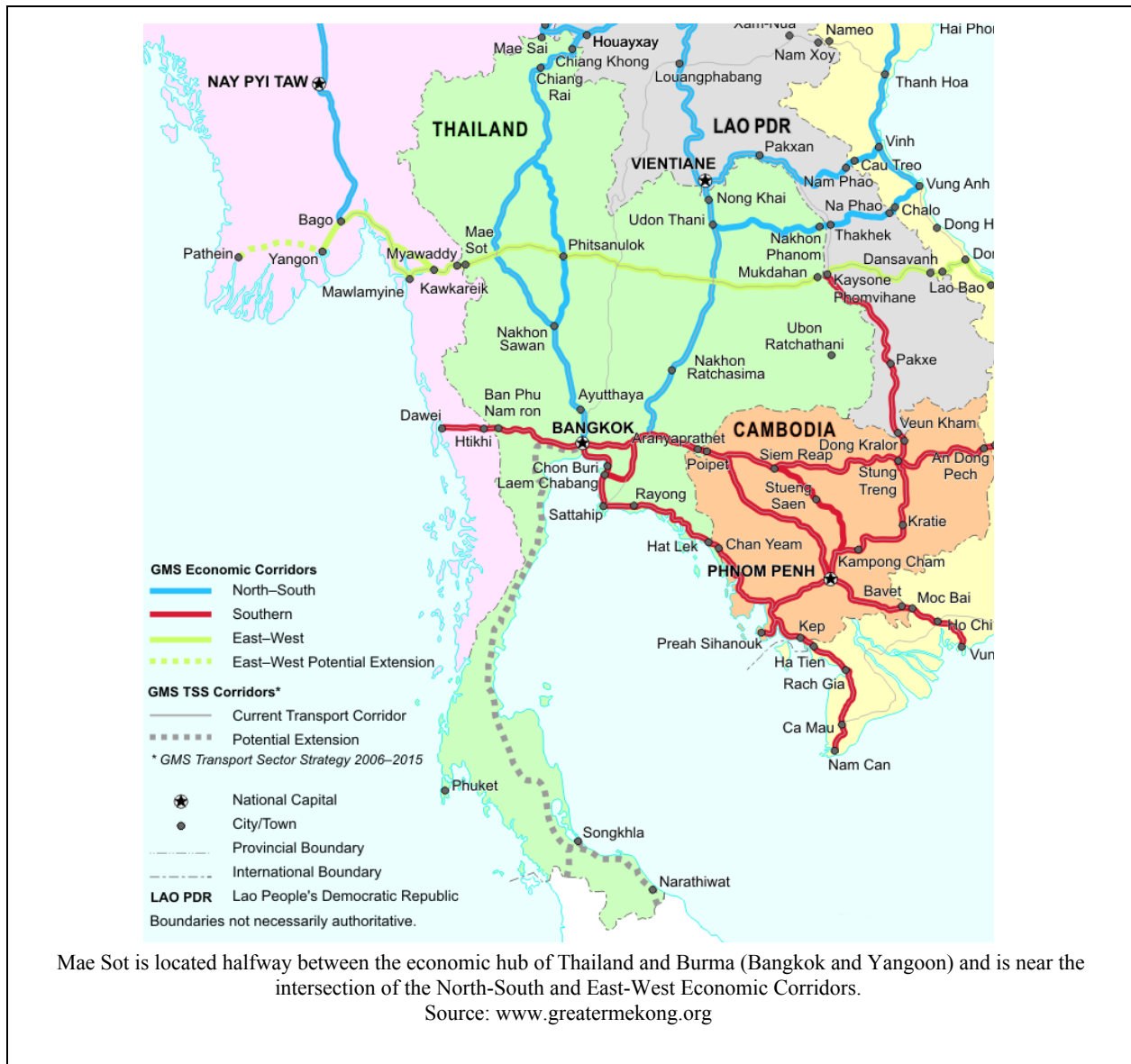
Illegally crossing to the Burmese side of the Moei River. Photo by Marieke Bierhoff

Migrant workers from Burma make up the majority of the labour force in all sectors of the local economy and are often marginalized, systematically being paid below the minimum wage and their rights not respected. However many continue to cross the border in search of employment opportunities as the average salary in Mae Sot for migrant workers ranges from 150 to 300 baht a day (4.34 to 8.69 euro), roughly two to three times the minimum wage of 3000 kyat (1.76 euro) a day in Burma.

In Thailand there are roughly 3.5 million migrants with regular or irregular status of which an estimated 2.3 million originate from Burma (IOM, 2015). What determines one's designation as a migrant worker in Thailand is a combination of occupation, documentation status and to some extent nationality. The term migrant worker usually applies to foreign individuals who may or may not be documented and work in low-skill sectors such as agriculture, fishing or factory work. In Thailand these individuals tend to come from its neighboring countries of Burma, Cambodia and Laos and as such their nationality has come to be associated, in Thailand, with low-skill labor and the term "migrant worker". The official census places the migrant population size at around 100.000 in Mae Sot; however they do not count the undocumented migrants. More recent estimates that have included both documented and undocumented place the Burmese migrant population size between 150.000 to 250.000 (Aung, 2014). Burma is a highly ethnically diverse country with 135 ethnic groups that are officially recognized by the Burmese

government (Smith, 1994). At the present date I have not been able to find a source that indicates the ethnic composition of the migrants from Burma. From my own fieldwork the people that I interviewed for this research project were extremely varied in terms of which ethnicity in Burma they identified with. There were people from 7 different states and while the proportions were roughly equal those from Rangoon, Bago, and Karen state outnumbered the rest slightly. Over the past decade Mae Sot has experienced a surge in investment from successive governments and businesses. Office blocks, hotels, department stores and homes are being built throughout the city and land prices have risen (Aung and Aung, 2009). In 2014 the first large retail stores, Tesco and Mega Home, opened in the city. The following year a Robinsons Lifestyle Center, owned by Central Group (one of Thailand's largest conglomerates), opened to profit from the booming local economy and the increase in Burmese cross-border shoppers. For many years Mae Sot has been the destination of choice for small Burmese traders who cross the border to buy products not sourced in Burma wholesale in order to sell them in their cities, towns and villages. During my fieldwork it was a common sight to see a pickup truck with a Burmese license plate carrying goods that were stacked up to twice the height of the car. In this instance this cross border trade is legal and it is projected that the retail market in Mae Sot will experience further growth due to the facilitation of cross-border travel (Tangseefa, 2016). In 2013 and 2014 flights from Mae Sot to Yangon and other Burmese cities were available but cancelled due to a weakening Baht and the worsening political situation in Thailand. Today the once quiet airport is being renovated and expanded to better suit the increase in demand (ibid). The city has also increasingly become a destination for Thai tourists who cross the border to go shopping or gambling which is legal in Burma. The sudden interest in Mae Sot can be explained by the convergence of national, transnational, and regional factors: its location halfway between the commercial hubs of Burma and Thailand, the opening up of Burma's economy since 2010, and the ASEAN Economic Community. Having experienced significant economic development in recent decades, Thailand is now the midst of an attempt to transition to a higher-income economy in order to better benefit from global and regional economic integration. Its geographic location at the center of continental Southeast Asia makes it a potential hub of ASEAN connectivity, regional production and distribution. To achieve this goal Thailand must develop its infrastructure and amend its laws in such a way that would facilitate trade and investment, be attractive to foreign direct investment, and remain globally competitive economically (Tangseefa, 2016). Mae Sot's location near the intersection of two major economic corridors in the Greater Mekong Subregion, the East-West Economic Corridor and the North-South Economic Corridor, as well as its location at the endpoint of the India-Myanmar-Thailand-Transnational-Highway make it central to plans for regional integration (Aung, 2014). Its strategic location on these economic corridors have led local government, national government,

and transnational institutions like the Asian Development Bank and ASEAN to invest in improvements and the construction of infrastructure in order to cut travel times for goods and people, maximizing the benefits of trade routes via Mae Sot.



While the subsiding in ethnic violence saw an increase in economic relations between Burma and Thailand, the historic election of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2010 and her party, the National League Democracy, in 2015 is an important milestone in the relations between the two countries. These elections, widely seen in a positive light in the international community, marked Burma as “open for business” and removed much of the negative implications of doing business there. Indeed numerous global investors

have since poured in to take advantage of a previously untapped market and the opportunities that come along with it. (Tangseefa, 2016). Since Aung San's election the total volume of border trade between the two countries has increased by 200% with more than 40% of this volume going through Mae Sot (ibid). Regional integration in the Greater Mekong Subregion has increased since the second half of the 1980's. In that time period Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam gradually began adopting market policies and open door policies. As trade liberalization progressed so did land-based connectivity while cross-border trade further increased. The ASEAN Economic Community is the most current regional economic integration initiative which aims to build on previous waves of regional integration by creating "a single market and production base characterized by free flows of goods, services, investment, skilled labour and easier movement of capital" that would make the region integrated into the global economy and highly competitive economically (Balcaite, 2016: p.881).

As noted the AEC is meant to create a single market composed of all ASEAN nations and is widely expected to boost trade between the member countries. To this end the Thai government has made plans for the creation of five special economic zones in five border towns, accelerated construction of the East-West Economic Corridor in the country by beginning construction on a second Customs Post, a second bridge connecting the two countries as well as an expansion of the highway connecting Mae Sot and Tak. Additionally the Thai government is assisting Burma the construction of their part of the corridor (Tangseefa, 2016). However it should be noted that the goal of the AEC is to facilitate the large-scale flow of capitals and commodities rather than people. In terms human flows that are sought to be facilitated by the economic regional initiative the focus is more on tourists and professionals, or in other words individuals who possess travel documents and are likely to travel via air for short periods of time. Therefore, even when fully implemented, some academics do not expect the AEC to directly affect intraregional migrant flows (Balcaite, 2016).

The life of a Burmese migrant worker in Mae Sot is often a marginalized one. While the official minimum wage is 300 baht (8.69 euro) a day, migrants report earning around 200 baht (5.79 euro) a day. Workers are guaranteed certain rights such as the aforementioned right to a minimum wage of 300 baht (8.69 euro) a day, the right to freedom of association, the right to organize and the right to collective bargaining. For example under Thai law workers, regardless of origin, are entitled to one day off in a week, not more than eight hour working days, not more than 48 hour working weeks, not more than 36 hours overtime which incidentally must be agreed upon beforehand. In practice none of these rights are respected for migrant workers in Mae Sot. In other words by Thai standards these workers are being

exploited (Arnold, 2005). As foreigners workers they are forbidden from forming trade unions and have to work in poor conditions. It is common practice for employers to keep the passports and ID cards of their workers in order to discourage them from running away as well as making it easier for them to be disposed of via deportation. It is through these means that employers are able to exert their control over their migrant workers. A lack of adherence to corporate codes of conduct and corporate social responsibility are some of the reasons behind the near constant state of exploitation and marginalization Burmese workers experience (ibid). Nevertheless many still chose to come to Mae Sot out of economic necessity as they are not able to sustain themselves and their families in Burma.

B. Migration in the borderland

About migration

A distinction must be made between authorised and unauthorised migration. Simply put authorized migration is international movement of people through regular and legal channels while unauthorized migration is the international movement of people through irregular and extralegal channels. Research on migration systems in Thailand by Battistella has shed light on the two major systems mechanisms of unauthorized migration in the ASEAN region. "One derives from the shifting of borders between contiguous countries, with a long tradition that predates the current political borders drawn by colonial powers." (Battistella, 2002:p.365). The historical migration of hilltribes to from Burma to Thailand during times of conflict serves as an example to this system of unauthorized migration. "The other is the result of development in sectors that require menial, dirty, unskilled jobs or jobs with little social prestige." (ibid). The significant number of illegal Burmese migrant workers in Mae Sot who left Burma to seek such jobs is an example of this second system of unauthorized migration. The social fabric of the city is shaped by a constant flux of arrivals and departures both authorized and unauthorized. To some Mae Sot represents a temporary stepping stone where they can adapt to Thai society before moving on to higher paying jobs in wealthier cities like Bangkok, Chiang Mai or other destinations (Lee, 2007). Economic hardship is not the only cause of such migration trends: taxation, forced labor and war are other reasons migrant communities cross the border into Mae Sot (Aung, 2014). The influx of refugees escaping conflict zones to Mae Sot prompted the UNHCR and western governments to initiate resettlement programs. This in turn generated a movement of people from Burma and other parts of Thailand to Mae Sot in the hopes of entering the nearby refugee camps in the hopes of resettlement to a third country (Lee, 2007). These migration trends show that migrants make a strategic calculation in their use of space to seek security in the borderlands, displaying both political agency and intentionality (Aung,

2014). They also show that situating their causes for migrating as economic motivations is not sufficient, different contexts such as the historical, geographic and political context are needed as well.

During the 1970's Thailand was a country of first asylum for refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos that were affected by the Vietnam war. During the 1980's it was the primary destination for various Burmese ethnic minorities, particularly the Karen, when conflict between the Burmese military and ethnic militias was at its peak. In the 1990's when this conflict subsided labour immigration to Thailand developed rapidly. The vast majority came from Burma with the rest coming from Cambodia and Laos. A lack of clear immigration policy, a booming construction industry, rapid economic growth in Thailand and stagnation in Burma facilitated the largely irregular immigration flow (Battistella, 2002). These factors, including an influx of capital in Mae Sot's industries, resulted in greater demand for labor in the city, the main part of the reason why Burmese workers choose the city as a destination for migration today. During Thailand's "economic miracle" between 1986 and 1996 the cost of labor increased (Arnold, 2005). This led to an increasing number of employers seeking cheaper labor and an increasing number of people from Burma migrating to Thailand to find low-wage jobs that locals often did not want. The result was a greater dependence of the Thai economy on cheap migrant labor, the influx of migrant workers, and their continued presence in Thailand to solve labor supply problems.

In an effort to increase the regularization of migrant workers a programme was initiated which required migrant workers to be registered by their employers through the government. In theory, once registered, migrants would receive a legal document which declares their status as "illegal, pending deportation" which in turn would allow them to stay for an unspecified amount of time (Reddy, 2016: p.254). In practice, however, a large majority of migrants did not participate either because they were not eligible, or because the programme only applied to 24 of the 76 provinces or because employers did not want to pay the registration fee and bond imposed by the government. Additionally many of those who were regularized did not stay with the same employer or renew their annual working permit. The Asian financial crisis of 1997 led to an increase in unemployment among Thai workers. Faced with this challenge the Thai government targeted a repatriation of 300,000 foreign workers as a means of providing more job opportunities for domestic Thai workers in 1998 and 1999 (Battistella, 2002). As a consequence of these repatriation initiatives industries such as fishing and agriculture were negatively affected as the majority of their labour force were Burmese, and Thai workers were not replacing the Burmese workers who were deported. This is partly due to the work in these sectors being labour intensive, low paying and having difficult working conditions and partly due to the low social prestige attributed to work in these sectors as it is seen as jobs *for* migrant workers or the poor (Chantavanich, 2007). Upon this realization the

government of Prime Minister Taksin Shinawatra once again launched a regularization initiative in 2001 to control unauthorized migration and registered 562'527 migrants between September and October (Battistella, 2002). This cycle of regularization and deportation occurs regularly, almost on a yearly basis, and “typically flip-flop in step with the vicissitudes of economic growth or decline, (and) political in/stability” (Reddy, 2016: p.254).

A 2015 International Organization for Migration (IOM) study which consisted of 5027 participants throughout Thailand found that Burmese migrants are primarily employed in construction (16.16%), fishery related work (15.56%), and agriculture (15.56%) (IOM, 2015). In Mae Sot adult migrants from Burma are most commonly employed in agriculture, farming and animal husbandry, construction and childcare while child workers are primarily employed in the knitting and garment sectors with some also working in factories that produce ceramics, canned food, and the assembling of small motors. Regardless of the sector, the vast majority of migrants in the Tak province (91.5%), the majority of whom are in Mae Sot, reportedly receiving salaries lower than the legal minimum wage of 300 baht a day (Dowding, 2015). In spite of work in these sectors being predominantly precarious in nature, with difficult workplace conditions, low wages, and little to no worker representation for workers Mae Sot and Thailand in general continues to be the primary destination for Burmese migrant workers (ILO, 2016).

Besides working in the formal or informal economy in Thailand many migrants also set up and run informal community-based organizations (CBOs) to assist the local migrant community with various challenges such as access to health services, access to legal services or access to education (Tangseefa, 2016). The terms NGO and CBO are sometimes used interchangeably and while most CBOs operate like small NGOs there are significant conceptual and practical differences. A CBO is a locally managed grassroots membership organization that is based in a community, or a group of adjacent communities, whose members are its main beneficiaries. In other words it is made by migrants for migrants. NGOs on the other hand operate in broader geographic areas than CBOs, its staff are not necessarily composed of beneficiaries, and work in broader thematic areas (Petrie and South, 2013).

CBOs are migrant-made community-based solutions that help build options for services that migrants normally have difficulty accessing. They represent the efforts of migrant workers to help one another and act as a support system in a city where the denial of their basic rights is a norm. Migrant learning centers are another example of what migrants do in Mae Sot that is not work related. A type of CBO, migrant learning centers are a non-formal migrant-made solution to accommodate to the educational and administrative needs of the community. Most are tuition-free, provide transport and meals, and are flexible in nature. For example many teachers in migrant learning centers do not have any certification or

experience in administration. Additionally, through learning centers migrants negotiate with employers, communicate with local government offices, and identify funding sources. This is because learning centers act as a hub for communication between children, parents, teachers, youth or guardians, and the migrant community (Arunothai, 2013). Lee likens migrant learning centers to quasi-administrative units that serve as a platform for the community to organize and disseminate information (Lee, 2008).

The percentage of migrants who have a fully legal documentation status can vary depending on their location and the sector they work in. Migrants working in manufacturing, sales or industrial production are more likely to be fully documented while those working in agriculture and other labour work are more likely to be undocumented (IOM, 2015). Thus the majority of migrants in Bangkok, most of whom are employed as factory workers, report having full or temporary documentation. In comparison migrants in Mae Sot, in which the agricultural sector represents the largest source of employment, report that less than half possess documentation (Dowding, 2015). Indeed, it is estimated that more than 75% of migrants in Mae Sot do not have official documentation (Aung, 2014). Thailand's visa and work permit systems are complex and often subject to change. Short registration periods, high fees, and bureaucratic complexity deter both migrants and employers from seeking proper documentation and increases dependence on brokers who charge high fees. Access to a fully legal status is also made more difficult by "challenges such as employers holding documents, work permits "tied" to employers [...], little access to benefits, high broker fees, and (illegal) charges from officials" (ILO, 2016: p.x). Furthermore an IOM study found that between documented and undocumented migrants differences in job satisfaction, access to services such as education or healthcare, and access to improved living and working conditions were limited (IOM, 2015).

Rampant rights violations in the workplace is in part possible due to a significant gap between policy and implementation regarding complaint mechanisms. Ill-defined institutional mandates, want of standard operating procedures and insufficient awareness-raising activities are the barriers to bridging this gap. The current policy does allow migrants to change workplaces should the employer die or violate labour protection laws but with great difficulty for the migrant. The new employer must work in the same industrial sector, the previous employer must sign a transfer form that gives their permission for the migrant to go to another employer, the entire procedure must be done within 15 days while migrants must leave Thailand within 7 days of being unemployed (ILO, 2014). Migrant workers and the organizations that assist them are reluctant to contact the police for these issues unless as a last resort. One of the reasons for this is because migrants are concerned about losing their work permits or how their employer will retaliate. Employers in Mae Sot bribe officials and police who in turn extort money from workers,

deport them when convenient, and sometimes are involved in trafficking, making them complicit in human rights violations. The claim of Arnold "It is clear that intimidating and sacking Burmese migrants who demand their rights has become a management strategy" (Arnold, 2005:p.330), thereby still seems to hold true.

Thailand's heavy reliance on cheap migrant labor means that legal and illegal migrants from Burma play an important role in the economic growth of Mae Sot. In light of the recent influx of investment in Mae Sot and its role in the plans of local and national government, Thai authorities have pushed to decrease the number of unregistered workers by imposing fines on workers and employers. Burmese workers who migrated to Mae Sot are residing in a city that is paradoxical at times in how its leaders migrant workers. On the one hand it is known by the state from experience that the departure of low skilled foreign workers negatively impacts key sectors in the economy. On the other hand the exploitation of these workers and the violation of their rights is systemic with migrants regularly witnessing flagrant violations of Thai law by employers and police officers against them with little to no consequences. Working in Mae Sot provides an opportunity to migrants for higher incomes and a refuge from state violence, forced taxation, and land confiscation. Working in Mae Sot also means they will be subjected to long work hours, forced overtime, unsafe working conditions and routine extortion by the police. In summary migrating to Mae Sot means migrating to an economic and political system that has institutionalized their marginalization yet depend on them for their success.

C. A Border Framework

In examining the intersections of how Burmese migrant workers and the Thai state have positioned themselves, four overarching themes emerge: globalisation, governmentality, marginalization and borderland dynamics (Wikramasekera, 2000, Tangseefa, 2016, Charoenolet, 2014, Lee, 2011). The theme of globalization emerges from the crucial role foreign migrant workers play in the Thai economy, the labor mobility of these migrants and the increasing interconnection between Burma and Thailand, whether politically and economically in the case of the AEC or in terms of infrastructure such as in the case of the IMTTH highway, a new cross-border bridge and more. The theme of governmentality emerges from the contextual manner in which migrants legal status is interpreted by the state, the treatment of migrants by government officials such as police officers and the manner in which laws are selectively applied in the case of migrant workers, such as the minimum wage law. The theme of marginalization of migrant workers emerges from how they experience significant rights violations that go ignored by police as well as how their legal status results in their treatment as second class citizens. The theme of

borderland dynamics emerges from the ways in which geography, politics and culture in the Thai-Burma border give Mae Sot its specificity as a border town. These themes provide a framework to understand the overlapping economic, legal, social and spatial positions migrant workers experience.

Globalization: the economic position of migrant workers

Globalization has several meanings: it can refer to the speed and density of interconnections among people and places, the endorsement of free trade and a regulatory agenda, corporate reorganization which transfer operations and finances transnationally to maximise profit, or the new mobility of labor which is tied to capital mobility (Tsing, 2000). Interconnection is created through circulation which can refer to people, money, cultures, information, international protocols and globalization itself. However much of the focus when discussing circulation is the object of flow rather than the social conditions that allow the flow or “channel making” to use Tsing’s conceptualization. For example global cities have gained their status as places where money, ideas and people flow. This was made possible because of the availability of corporate real estate, telecommunications grids and professional service workers (ibid). Taking Tsing’s definition of globalization we see that in the context of Mae Sot globalization can refer to the speed and density of interconnections between Burma and Thailand through which flow people, ideas, money, culture and international protocols. By further adding her concept of “channel making” the social conditions that allow for the flow of Burmese migrants into Mae Sot can come to light. For example, the vision of the Thai government for the city is that of a “regional trade and transport hub for the Southeast, South, and East Asian Regions” (Tangseefa, 2016:p.5). To ensure the realization of this vision the state claims planned Special Economic Zones, hastened the construction of the Asian Highway and signed international protocols aimed at facilitating the flow of goods, people and capital such as the AEC. These efforts can be seen as channel making as all are meant to facilitate flows of various kinds. The changing of social conditions with the goal of raising Mae Sot’s economic position in a city whose majority population are migrant workers and who compose a significant component of its economic position will likely directly or indirectly have an impact on the economic position of Burmese migrants in Mae Sot. By looking at these social conditions it is possible to answer not only *what* is the economic position of migrants but also *how* they came to be in this position. There are three main perspectives on the impact of globalization on the nation state: the globalist, sceptical and transformationalist perspectives (Held, 2002). A globalist perspective finds that economic power is increasingly concentrated in the hands of transnational organizations as states are pressured to adopt market-friendly strategies. In contrast a sceptical approach still believes in the power of the state as national politics play an important role in deciding whether a national economy should be more or less opened to the world market. The

transformationalist perspective claims that rather than states controlling markets or being controlled by them, states are situated in a long term historical process in which globalisation encourages the reshaping and restructuring the power of national governments (ibid). Applying a globalist lens to Thailand would infer that its economic decisions and channel making efforts are a reaction to external market forces. Charoenloet's attribution of the introduction of the current minimum wage, with the goal of stimulating industrial upgrading, due to stronger competition from emerging low-cost countries is an example of a globalist perspective on globalization in Thailand (Charoenloet, 2015). On the other hand applying the sceptical lens of globalization would attribute the Thai government's economic decisions and "channel making" efforts to a result of national politics that determine a national economic strategy within the context of a global market. Pongsawat's view that these efforts in the border town are "the articulation of spatial administration by various factions of the state agencies that regulate people, by the deployment of a certain set of territorializations" is an example of a sceptical perspective on globalization in Thailand (Pongsawat, 2007:p.8). These contrasting perspectives may attribute the actions of the Thai government to different things but they both serve as means to answer *how* Burmese migrants came to have the economic positions they do in Thailand. By examining this question through both globalist and sceptical lens the relation between migrants economic position and external market forces and internal national dynamics can be brought to light. When making a connection between globalization and migration, one must approach the topic with caution. Reasons for migration are complex issues which are and often simplified as movement from a poor nation to a richer one (Wickramaskera, 2002). Fast growing economies in Asia such as Japan, South Korea and Thailand have undergone a demographic transition and are vulnerable to labour shortages due to their ageing populations and low birth rates. In comparison to these labour-receiving countries labour-sending countries such as the Philippines or Burma are characterized by high rates of population growth. To offset the negative impacts of population decline higher levels of immigration would be needed (ibid). The need/shortage in labour receiving countries of workers willing to do dirty, dangerous, and demanding jobs combined with the higher wages offered in comparison to wages labour-sending countries are the commonly mentioned economic push-pull factors. While economic factors do contribute to migration there are other factors that play an important role as well. Other reasons for migration can also include the desire of an individual to put distance between themselves and violent or otherwise undesirable state actions such as repression, forced taxation, land confiscation and more (Aung, 2012). An important component of understanding how a Burmese migrant worker perceives their experience and position in Thailand is to understand why they migrated and left their homeland. Ultimately their perceptions on their position in Mae Sot will be influenced by their previous position in Burma and whether that position has improved, if this is the case it also helps in

explaining why they choose to stay despite the exploitation (Arnold, 2005). In the encounters between the state and travelers or migrant workers we see how the capacity of the state to create rules, identify citizens and command compliance, in other words its sovereignty, is produced by the transnational movement of people, goods and policies (Chalfin, 2008). The spaces designated by a state as a place where foreign nationals officially enter the country, such as an airport or a border crossing, are spaces where Appadurai's disjunctures of global modernity are strongly present (Apparundai, 1996). In such spaces multiple national and supranational agendas collide and converge "forcing self-examination, dissension, and contemplation of new forms of social order among state agents and state subjects alike" (Chalfin, 2008:p.520). State authorities such as customs officers or police officers serve as an "effective sovereign" as they are identified and associated with the wider powers of the state. Thus the encounter between state authorities and travelers reveal a greater "collision" between domestic authority and extranational power, social contract and individual conviction. In these interactions the "human" aspect of state actors comes into play: their unconscious desires, their temptations, their discourses and their narratives (ibid). When examining the role of globalisation in an area or between and individual and a state, assuming the existence of a single coherent system is analytically insufficient. Overlaps, alliances, collaborations and complicities are all of importance.

The "globalisation" that emerges from these convergences is more unstable with varied agendas, practices and processes that may or may not be deeply interconnected (Tsing, 2002). Encounters between state officials and travellers are as indicative of a struggle over position as they are indicative of the power of relationships to create new experiences and potentials of personhood. These struggles are a convergence of values in the negotiations over rights and resources which simultaneously put modes of being and expression, and modes of resource control and repression into play. Thus both traveler and state actor occupy a "spectrum of subject positions and a spectrum of agencies" (Chalfin, 2008:p.520). Overall considering the encounter between the two parties contributes to the development of my research question by providing a framework for how a migrants economic position is produced, not only by the exertion of sovereignty by a representative of the state but also by the overlapping agendas of all actors involved. In particular it enables this thesis to differentiate between the agendas of local authorities and the central government, which are not always aligned, and how the two differently influence the economic and overall position of migrants.

Increased international interconnectedness through globalization means that factors and events beyond Thailand's borders can affect the country. Research on the impact of globalization and

industrialization on Thailand's labour market through capital invested by foreign companies by Charoenloet has found that while there has been a rise in wage employment, a form of employment in which an employer pays an employee in exchange for work done on an hourly or daily basis, over half of the labour force is in a state of non-wage employment. In the context of Charoenloet's argument the term non-wage employment refers to those who are self-employed and do not receive payment from employers in the form of wages or salaries (Charoenloet, 2015).

Thailand's economy has grown significantly since it adopted a policy of liberalization in 1985 but is still dependent on foreign direct investment (FDI) driven export-oriented industrialization. A downside of this dependence is the impermanent nature of employment opportunities created by the inflow of FDI as the flows are susceptible to fluctuations in demand abroad. While FDI has flowed into the country a lack of investment in technological and industrial upgrading from low to higher value added activities has led to employers resorting to cost cutting measures such as subcontracting low value added activities to informal workers. Doing so allows employers to bypass the minimum wage legislation and not observe labour laws governing work in the informal sector, in addition to not being able to unionise, the bargaining power of informal workers is effectively undermined. All of this leaves a significant share of the labour force vulnerable to the abuses from employers and the state (Charoenlet, 2015). Thus while the percentage of wage employment has increased so did the vulnerability of the informal workers that are part of that percentage, whom are primarily migrants. In other words external factors such as lack of investment in technological and industrial upgrading by overseas companies influenced the actions of employers domestically which in turn affects migrant workers in Mae Sot as employers become dependent on their weakened bargaining power to keep costs low. Thus the weak socio-economic position of migrant workers in Mae Sot can also be attributed to external factors such as fluctuations in FDI and Thailand's dependence on them.

Given the many pressures migrants face from their employers and the state one would assume that such pressures would result in working class fragmentation. Working class fragmentation refers to the reduction of working class social formations which enable them to resist exploitative management through display of worker solidarity or resistance (Campbell, 2016). Through the creation of cheaper and flexible workforces Thai companies sought to strengthen the position of management and weaken that of informal workers by creating conditions that would result in class fragmentation. Examples of these conditions include being paid below the legal minimum wage, confiscation of their legal documents, excessive overtime and other violations of Thai labor law by employers. Contrary to the expectation that such conditions would lead to class fragmentation they have instead made possible new social formations

which Campbell refers to as class recomposition. During his fieldwork in Mae Sot researching the everyday intra-workforce socialization among migrant workers from Burma Campbell observed that “everyday cooperation and mutual aid among migrant factory workers in Mae Sot, enacted in response to their precarious conditions of employment, have produced the social cohesion needed for more confrontational forms of collective struggle” (Campbell, 2016:p.112). Taking care of the children of others, store owners allowing customers to pay them at a later date, celebrating religious holidays together are a few of the many examples of class recomposition Campbell observed (ibid). In other words class recomposition refers to the strengthening of ties and acts of solidarity among migrant workers under the same conditions that could have led to class fragmentation.

Campbell’s findings has implications for this paper and its questions of what is the economic position of migrants is and how it is produced. It highlights how the economic position of migrant workers is not only determined by outside forces such as their employers, the Thai government or global economic crises but also themselves. When considering what determines the economic position of migrants and the forces weaken it through actions that can be considered class fragmentation we must also consider how the response of migrants to class fragmentation results in class recomposition and how this also affects their economic position. How can all the elements that shape the economic position of Burmese migrant workers be taken into account?

Governmentality: the legal position of migrant workers

Foucault's work on governmentality explores the shifting character of power. The exercise of sovereign power has been augmented by governmental power and is no longer solely the exercise over a territory (Foucault, 1995). Thus Foucauldian perspectives of surveillance and governmentality allows one to examine the logic behind these state actors who decide who is wanted and unwanted. Foucault argues that the power exerted by a state over its subjects, when power is understood as something that is externally imposed over individuals and groups of people, does not extend to the realm of thought and regulation (Foucault, 1976). In his analysis of power he argues that power is a relation of force expressed through struggle and submission, otherwise known as the struggle-repression scheme. Conceptualizing how it is employed and exercised, he describes power as something that is wielded in a net-like manner as opposed to something that is handed to an individual or group (ibid). At the individual level the articulation of power is to be conceived in terms of the individual being one of its prime effects rather than a simple unit affected by power exerted on them. Within these forms of power relations (relation of

force, struggle-submission, individual) the gestures, discourses and desires of individuals, in relation to a certain power dynamic, can be identified and constituted. According to Foucault this is the theoretical basis of how governmentality can shape an individual's constitution and the functioning of mechanisms of power (ibid).

Two major components of modern society are sovereign power and what he terms disciplinary power (Foucault, 1976). Disciplinary power is a power that is exercised over human bodies through specific procedural techniques instead of sovereign power. Sovereign power is based on public law and is a power that is founded on the existence of a sovereign, who created the laws. The legal status of each citizen and their social body are the principal articulation of these laws. Disciplinary power is based on normalization. It ensures the cohesion of the aforementioned social body through a grid of disciplinary coercion. Foucault proposed the concept of disciplinary power because the state cannot inhabit the entirety of actual power relations as the sole power network. There exists other power networks “that invest in the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth” (Pongsawat, 2007:p.71). The state and its power (sovereign power) is superstructural and rooted to these multiple and indefinite power networks (disciplinary power). States need forms of social and power relations on an everyday life level to generate and sustain growth. In other words this governmental power is not simply possessed by states but is also reproduced through social interaction (Edkins, 2004). Institutional practices of power such as state policy can have a constructive role in the constitution of individuals as, how they perceive others and themselves. Work on the governmentality of immigration has argued that while globalization has led to an increased circulation of goods it also led to increased constraints on the mobility of people by the state (Fassin, 2011). This is manifested through the states exertion of its rule to it’s subjects at its periphery, the installation of a surveillance apparatus on its physical borders, the production of racialized boundaries and laws of exception regarding legal or illegal immigrants. Doing so has given the nation-state has a renewed role: imposing border surveillance, increasingly declining the right to asylum, deporting illegal aliens by a non-legitimate regime (ibid). Concepts such as passports, visa, working permits permit the state to rule its subjects more efficiently and creates a divide between legal and illegal residents. However, the distinction is not always clear cut and socio-economic contexts also play a role in the way people are classified. This blurred distinction is in part due to multiple actors being involved in the decision making process as well as a distrust of “outsiders” who have become objects of oppression, particularly in regards to granting asylum to the “other” (ibid). While foreign migrant workers may enter a country illegally and work there illegally, their presence can still be sanctioned by the state due to a structural dependence. The contradiction between an anti-immigrant

attitude and a structural dependence on illegal immigrant labor results in an intentional marginalization of foreign workers and little policy regarding their welfare (Ball, 2002). Therefore the issue of citizenship is crucial as it provides the legal basis for migrants being accepted and rejected by the Thai state, in other words it is the legal basis for their marginalization. The notion of governmentality is therefore useful in order to understand the goals and strategies of the Thai state regarding Mae Sot and the Burmese migrants who live and work in the border region.

Due to the majority of the population of Mae Sot being composed of migrants as well as the heavy dependence of various sectors on their presence, migrants are a central component of the governing activities of state agencies in Mae Sot. Furthermore Mae Sot has a particular governance system compared to other areas in Thailand away from state borders. As a Thai town it is theoretically solely subject to the Thai system of governance, yet in practice Thai state agencies do not monopolize the governance of Mae Sot especially in regards to non-Thai citizens. Burmese, Thai and international organizations also take part in governance of migrants in the city. In other words non-Thai regimes are also integrated into the governance procedure though to a lesser degree than the Thai state (Lee, 2008). An example of the accommodation of alternative governing regimes/style is the informal acceptance by local authorities of cards issued by the international and ethnic-based organizations mentioned above being used as de facto identity cards by migrants. While cards issued by organizations are usually not recognized by the Thai government as legally valid identification documents, the quasi acceptance of these cards also translates to a quasi acceptance of the issuing entity by Thai authorities as a quasi legitimate alternative governing regime. Hence the Thai authorities have not only made migrants a central component of governance in Mae Sot but have also accommodated to other governing styles that range from legal to illegal (ibid). Immigration policies under Border Partial Citizenship, for example, can therefore be seen as being a form of governmentality and instrumental in the constitution of migrant workers as “a source of cheap labour to be managed and controlled, rather than one that empowers them as active participants in a democratic community” (Tangseefa, 2016:p.17). Furthermore the previous example of how legally invalid cards are implicitly accepted as valid documentation by Thai authorities during their interactions with Burmese migrants demonstrates Foucault's perspective that governmentality is reproduced through social interaction. It also demonstrates Fassins argument that the distinction between legal and illegal migrants is indeed not clear cut, in part due to the presence of multiple actors in the decision making process. How does governmentality help in understanding the legal position of migrant workers in Thailand? It examines the logic behind the Thai states informal acceptance of the illegal presence of migrants as well as the logic behind its acceptance of other actors who “legitimize”

migrants illegal presence. Furthermore it examines how their legal position is not only produced by the governmental power of the Thai state but also reproduced through social interaction.

Marginalization: the social position of migrant workers

The concept of marginalization is applied in this paper to Burmese migrant workers in order to understand how marginalizing conditions contribute to a migrants social position in Thai society. Marginalization or social exclusion has several definitions which vary depending on the country or society in question. For example while the ILO defined social exclusion in Peru as “the inability to participate in aspects of social life considered important. These are economic, cultural and political. Social exclusion occurs when there is mutual feedback, rather than offsetting, relationships between the inability to participate in these three dimensions of social life” (Kadun, 2014:p.81) in their case study of Thailand it was defined as “a process through which citizenship rights on which livelihood and living standards depend are not recognized and respected. This involves relationships between people, in which rights are challenged and defended through negotiations and conflict” (ibid). While the meaning and causes of marginalization vary depending on historical, political and geographic contexts a commonality in the various definitions is that it is a social phenomenon that results in the exclusion of a certain segment of a population from society in one form or the other. Thus perspectives on marginalization allow one to examine the social position of disadvantaged individual or group within that society. When this concept is applied to migrants in a host society multiple factors contribute to their social marginalization and therefore their social position. In regards to structural factors “social inequality, conflict of social interest among different groups, an unfair distribution of power, property, information, production pattern and consumption” are examples of top-down marginalizing forces (Srivirojana et al, 2014:p.38). Akin to the notion that governmentality is reproduced through social interactions, an individual or groups sense of marginalization can also be further compounded by the social processes that form their beliefs and feelings about themselves and their place in their host society. The aforementioned social processes refers to how migrants perceive themselves as well as the perceptions, attitudes and behavior of locals towards migrants. (ibid). In other words social marginalization is in part caused by institutional practices of power, by social process within the marginalized group and by social processes outside of it. The notion of marginalization is therefore useful in order to understand the process in which the social position of migrants in Thai society is created by its individuals, communities or social structures. Through this understanding the question of “what is the social position of migrants?” can begin to be answered. In

examining the social position of migrants through the lens of marginalization not only are the various causes of their social position identified but the causes of their legal, economic and spatial positions as well. This overlap is due to the legal, economic and spatial position of migrants taking place within the context of Thai society. For example when the economic position of migrants is being discussed it is their economic position in Thailand and therefore in Thai society that is being discussed. In this sense the social position of migrants is a “macro” position that is informed by their “micro” economic, legal and spatial positions. While there are more components that make up the whole of migrants social position for the purposes of this research paper I limit the scope of these factors to the three stated in the research question: legal, economic and spatial. Thus examining how the social position of migrants is created through the lens of marginalization not only answers one of this thesis’ sub questions but also incorporates its other sub questions regarding migrants positions into a general overview of how they perceive and experience their overall position in Thailand.

Borderland dynamics: the spatial position of migrant workers

Borders are spatial and political demarcations in which territory and identity collide (Tandia, 2010). Conventional approaches regarding border societies tended to conceptualize natives as being “spatially incarcerated” and separated from one another by a border (Appadurai, 1996). Gupta and Ferguson critique this assumption and argue that the isomorphism of space, place and culture is particularly implausible for those who inhabit borderlands as their lives are regularly shaped by their relationships and influences with the other side (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). Indeed they argue that the term “borderlands” is more adequate a term to conceptualize the particular dynamics of border societies as “the term does not indicate a fixed topographical site between two other fixed locales (nations, societies, cultures), but an interstitial zone of displacement and deterritorialization that shapes the identity of the hybridized subject” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992:p.18). Thus examining the dynamics of border societies through the lens of borderland dynamics enables one to examine how the lives of its inhabitants is shaped by their spatial position near a border. Despite the interconnected nature of borderlands they are ultimately considered by their respective nation-states as being a part of their sovereign territory and thus falling under their control. While the nation-state has influence on its periphery, the degree and extent of this influence is a subject of debate. The statist approach to the study of state borders views borders as a symbol demarcating national sovereignty that differentiates the populace countries. These political boundaries are used as a means to maintain control over any capital, goods, information and people that

enter and leave its territory. Within the statist paradigm the movement of people across its borders must be authorized by the state while unauthorized movement is checked and subject to deportation. The state has complete monopoly over the governing system in the border areas as much as non-border areas. Non-state governing regimes are not accommodated to (Lee, 2008). In this understanding of the state, the government has a monopoly on the use of physical force within its territory. The culturalist approach pays attention to "space" rather than "boundaries". Here borders are "the normal locales of the postmodern subject (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997 quoted in Lee, 2008). Borders are social places in which people's lives are rooted and does not divide but connects two countries. The influence of states on local border cultures is limited. Borderlanders themselves determine governance in border areas and prefer limited state interference in their day to day life. Both approaches share a limitation in that they do not take into account how political instability in border areas can impact the influence of state governance on their population. Unstable political conditions in one country can have spillover effects on the other side of the border, the refugee crisis serving as a useful example. A sudden influx of refugees and migrants into border areas changes local social conditions from what they were before as well as making them different to other regions. The presence of this alien population results in governance no longer being totally monopolized by the state (ibid). Therefore the notion of borderland dynamics is crucial to understanding how the lives of migrants are shaped through their spatial position in a border society such as Mae Sot. It not only examines how these lives are shaped through its fluid, dynamic, and interconnected nature but also nuances the forms of governance that shape their lives due to their position at the periphery of a centralized nation-state. Border partial citizenship refers to the particular status given to migrant and illegal immigrant workers by the Thai government. Coined by Pongsawat it conceptualizes the at times uncertain legal position of migrants on the border (Pongsawat, 2007). Additionally it can also be used to conceive how Thai "governmentality" influences the constitution of migrants. Thus it specifies the combined spatial impact of state, economic and social formations on migrant workers in Mae Sot and the border region. Pongsawat argues that given the important role migrants play in the economic growth of the border region, border partial citizenship significantly impacts the trajectories of urban development on the Thai-Burma border. Thus it is an important component of borderland dynamics. There are two main systems of border partial citizenship: the minority immigrant worker regime and the registered illegal migrant worker regime. The surveillance system which emerged from these two systems in order to monitor the mobility of those crossing the border structures economic activity in the region. Border partial citizenship is a means of entitlement, control and exploitation created and implemented by the Thai government. It allows for the examination of the position of migrants in Mae Sot from a top-down perspective as well as illustrate the strategies employed by the Thai state. Ultimately border partial

citizenship determines the legal status of migrants in Thai society and thus a part of their position in Thailand and their experience of this position. To cope with the dynamics of being a Burmese migrant worker in the borderlands migrants employ everyday resistance. Everyday resistance is “the nearly continuous, informal, undeclared, disguised forms of autonomous resistance by the lower classes.” (Scott, 2010:p.130). When applied to migrant communities the concept of everyday resistance describes the strategies employed as a reaction to the threats and challenges posed by Burmese or Thai authorities and employers. Resistance can take many forms, from large-scale actions such as migrant worker strikes or small-scale actions such as sharing information about incoming police raids and how to avoid checkpoints (Aung, 2014). In the context of migrant strategies everyday resistance is not to be seen as a clear cut opposition between the oppressor and oppressed but rather as a non-opposition characterized by evasion, containment, and collaboration. The evasion of the state or the spatial practices of the state adds a spatial dynamic to everyday resistance. I suggest that this concept as used by Scott and Aung can also refer to an added conceptual layer of opportunism. While resistance implies a mitigation of threats my suggestion proposes would also conceptualize the persistence of opportunism in difficult conditions. By considering the position of Burmese workers in the borderlands and beyond through the lens structural oppression the interaction between migrants and state policy and company practices comes to the forefront. By considering their position from the perspective of opportunism the motivations of migrants to look for work despite harsh conditions is highlighted. This is done to avoid the immediate assumption that the position of migrants is that of a victim without addressing the agency they display in various situations. Thus the concept of everyday resistance can refer to the strategic decisions employed by migrants to maximize the benefits of their position and minimize the threats to that position. As such it is a useful tool to ascertain the diverse tactics of marginalized migrant workers in Mae Sot. Friction of cartography is a term coined by Aung who added a conceptual layer to James Scott’s “friction of terrain” which described the idea that use the rugged terrain by highland communities in Southeast Asia as a means of protection from violent, valley-based expansion (Scott, 2010). Aung expanded on this concept by describing friction of cartography as the spatially-oriented attempts to evade state actors for the same reasons but through a strategic manipulation of the geopolitical demarcation that is a border in order to find refuge from state violence (Aung, 2014). Both friction of terrain and friction of cartography are spatial forms of everyday resistance as the fundamental goal is evading the reach of the state. As a concept friction of cartography is a useful tool to see how Burmese migrant workers use the border for their own interests, their motivations for leaving their home of origin and consequently their perception of their homeland and Mae Sot. Their perception of the home which they left, whether by choice or by force, provides a partial explanation for

why migrant workers in Mae Sot would seek or continue to work there despite the difficulties as their current position in the city would be compared to their previous position in Burma.

D. Research Question

The question remains: how do these workers experience and perceive their position in Thailand within these overlapping dynamics? To address this research question several underlying questions need to be addressed:

1. What is the legal status of migrant workers in Mae Sot?
2. What are the strategies of migrants in Mae Sot in light of their marginalized position?

The first question addresses the source of much of their experience in Mae Sot: their legal status. The impact of their legal status overlaps with the economic, social and spatial position. For example it determines what kind of occupations they work in, how they are treated by police and how they can navigate the borderlands despite their mobility being restricted and more. This question links to border partial citizenship which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3. The second question addresses how migrants cope with being marginalized on multiple levels: socially, economically, legally and spatially. It also sheds light as to how migrants perceive the marginalizing forces that they experience in their day to day lives. This question thus primarily concerns migrant strategies which will be explored in chapter 4. The theoretical tools of “governmentality”, “globalization”, “marginalization” and “borderland dynamics” will be used to answer these questions and conceptualize how the policies and institutions that determine their legal status influence their strategic and spatial decisions as well as their everyday lives.

E. Methodology

Methodological Approach

The materials derived from an ethnographic research project on the migrant experience in Thailand provides the basis for this thesis. The research project employed a qualitative method, combined with a review of existing literature and was conducted from January to March 2017. While much documentation has been produced by organizations and academics working on migrant issues in Thailand, the situation in Mae Sot is constantly evolving making primary research necessary to assess the situation during the period of my fieldwork. From the onset the primary perspective will be that of the migrants however the perspective of the employers will also be taken into account in order to have a more balanced view of all

parties involved. While I was not able to find an employer to interview I will attempt to use information from migrants and previous research to see from the employers side of the story and what perspectives they may have on the positions of migrants in Mae Sot.

Research Context

Research took place in the city of Mae Sot. Mae Sot was selected as a research site because it has an important borderland population and is the biggest border town in the Thai-Burma borderlands.. Each site was selected based on having community members that previously participated in focus group discussions with Dreamlopmments. The research was conducted in order to develop an evidence based assessment of the experiences and perceptions of Burmese migrant workers in Mae Sot relating to their position in the city.



Exterior of a Burmese migrants house in Mae Sot. Photo: Stanley Nosten

Research Sample

Most participants were introduced to me by Khun Bhee, a Thai-Burmese woman and social worker employed by the non-profit social enterprise Dreamlopmments. Having most participants introduced to me by one person could influence my results. Dreamlopmments is a mission-driven private company that works on aid and development with vulnerable populations in such a way that leverages their strengths. Currently it is running its first project, a low-cost not-for-profit health insurance program for migrants named the Migrant Fund, in Mae Sot. I met Nicolas Durier, Dreamlopmments director, in Mae Sot in summer of 2016. Upon hearing that Dreamlopmments had conducted focus group discussions with migrant communities in the Mae Sot area and knowing that I wanted to do something similar for my thesis I asked him if I could talk to the community worker that helped facilitate these discussions, Khun Bhee, as well as the migrants interviewed. He agreed and asked that in exchange I would keep the identities of the migrants private, appropriately compensate the participating migrants and community worker, and that my thesis would have a relation to the mission of Dreamlopmments centering on vulnerable populations.

The foreign workers participated in the interviews and focus groups took time from their day after work to assist me and already do not earn minimum wage. In terms of compensation I paid Khun Bhee, the translators and the driver 1000 baht (28.95 euro) each per day while participants, upon Bhee's suggestion, were given gifts in the form of basic necessities such as toothpaste, cooking oil and shampoo in order for their participation to not be solely financially motivated which may have affected the data collected

Migrant workers, academics, representatives from CBOs and NGOs, and a member of the local government were selected for stakeholder/ key informant interviews. In total, 17 of these interviews were conducted with 5 being focus group discussions in 5 different communities within Mae Sot, 8 with individuals from these focus groups, 2 with academics, 1 with a representative of a CBO, 2 with a representative of an NGO and 1 with a member of the local government. As previously mentioned the migrant communities were selected based on their having participated in a previous focus group with the social enterprise Dreamlopmments. Other key informants were selected based on their history of working with migrants or in the case of the academics, researching migrant issues.



Focus Group conducted in a migrant community in Mae Sot. Photo: Stanley Nosten

Data Collection

Several data collection methods were employed to answer the questions asked by this paper. Firstly focus group discussions were conducted in the form questionnaires. This was done to get a broad overview of the present situation in Mae Sot as perceived and experienced by Burmese migrant workers. Focus groups provided an easy way for me to identify people's biographical information, their motivations for coming to Mae Sot, their ethnicity and habitual patterns after work. Topics discussed also included their day to day lives, what led to their departure from Burma, strategies in emergency situations, future plans and perceptions of the Thai state and employers. I conducted them in various homes of migrant workers that were introduced to me via Khun Bhee. Following the focus groups 8 individuals who participated were selected for semi-structured personal interviews to deepen the general understanding that emerged from the focus groups. The interview questions were oriented towards having the interviewees tell their life story, describing in a chronological manner their experience in Burma and Mae Sot as well as their perception of these experiences. I had found that many participants were shy and and their response was

sparse in details. For this reason I selected the participants who dominated the discussions on the basis that they provided the most details during the focus group discussions and would probably do the same during personal interviews. These individuals were diverse in age ranging from young adults to the elderly. The sectors they worked in ranged from NGO to factory worker to self-owned businesses. Ethnicity and length of stay in Mae Sot also was extremely diverse. Seven of the eight were women. Not all migrants who were interviewed had participated in the focus groups. In order to avoid a potential limitation in the data all were asked to complete the same questionnaire that was used in the focus group discussions. The interviews with non-migrants were in the format of informal conversations. Site observations took place at each community and checkpoints I visited with a focus on the physical surroundings and social interactions that around me.

Limitations

One of the most significant limitations of the research was the larger number of women interviewed than men which reduces the representativeness of the sample group. The major contributing factors included a lack of availability on the part of male workers as well as the relation between the workplace and the community/individual. For example factory workers are predominantly female thus when conducting a focus group in a community located next to a factory the majority of participants were female factory workers. Another limitation was the dependence on contracted interpreters. There were issues of uniformity in the quality of translation of interviews and focus group discussions. In some instances the translator did not convey word for word what migrants were saying but instead a general idea due to limitations in their vocabulary which resulted in a weakening of the data collected. While the goal of the questionnaires was to get a broad overview it became evident that more follow-up questions should have been asked and some questions should have been reformulated. For example when asked if their labour rights were respected the some responses were yes/no answers. Rather than pressing for more details or specific examples I moved on to the next question because I felt uncomfortable with pushing forward with a topic that might be sensitive. This question also should have been reformulated to ask if specific rights were being violated. Furthermore the questions regarding migrant strategies in the questionnaire were vague and short. The questionnaire asked them about their responses to mistreatment by police/employers but due to a significant oversight did not contain questions about day to day acts of resistance. All of the aforementioned issues with the questionnaire resulted in a lack of depth in the data collected. Finally and perhaps the most significant limitation was that I did not directly ask migrants how

they experienced and perceived their position in Mae Sot but instead asked indirectly through related questions.

F. Ethics discussion

It is my ethical obligation as an anthropologist to ensure that all the individuals involved in my research are not negatively impacted by my actions, by being fired or deported for example. By writing this thesis and conducting interviews the possibility of influencing, however slightly, the relationship between workers and their employers, migrants and the state depends on how the text will be disseminated. In this regard I choose to not have my thesis disseminated beyond the context of being graded by Leiden University and shared with the director of dreamlopmements and the academics I interviewed. Ethics in research considers ways of ethically conducting research while being mindful of the potential impact participating in a research study can have. Ethical considerations in research can encompass the sensitivity of a topic to how the researcher conducts their study. I did my utmost to show respect and appreciation for the sharing of their knowledge and time and made significant efforts to put them at ease. Asking myself how to anticipate and mitigate risk to the participants as much as possible I concluded that it would be best to meet at the time and place that they desired. I made sure to be mobile and have a car and driver ready to take me when needed and simply met them in their homes because the mobility and visibility of the participants can sometimes result in their having trouble with the police. All participants were given the option of being anonymous during data collection and the writing of the research or using their real names. All transcriptions of the focus group discussions and interviews use a fake name and, in addition to all interview materials, are available only to my person. Most people who were approached accepted to be interviewed but were uncomfortable with signing consent forms as they either did not know how to read the text or felt that their employers would not like hearing of them signing documents. Thus in order to achieve similar results while respecting their wishes all participants were given an opportunity to have their verbal consent recorded before the start of the interview/focus group.

Chapter 2: Contextualizing a porous border

A. Introducing Mae Sot as a border town

Thailand and Burma share a 1800 kilometer border connected mainly by mountainous lands. Mae Sot and the Thai-Burma cross-border region's specificity was shaped by ethnic conflicts, drug trafficking and the remoteness of the area. Mae Sot is located between the Thai Thanon Thongchai mountain range and the Burmese Dawna mountain range. It's location between two mountain ranges and the roughness of the mountain terrain has historically restricted links between Mae Sot and the outside, shaping the city's unique population formation, culture and economy (Lee, 2011). The Moei river separates the border town from its Burmese counterpart, Myawaddy. The two cities, and therefore countries, are connected by the busy Thai-Burma Friendship Bridge. Located not far from the British Empire's international deep seaport, Mae Sot has been a prominent node that linked traders travelling between the Indian Ocean and mainland Southeast Asia for for many years. Fugitives and asylum seekers have also taken advantage of its geographic location in their movements across borders (ibid). Given these spatial conditions a great variety of ethnic groups have lived in the city for generations: "first were the Karens, later on the Tais, the Chinese from Yunnan, the Burmans, the Muslims from Bangladesh and northern Thailand, the Sikhs and the Hindus from India. Later on, many Tais, Chinese, and Burmans also fled turbulence in Burma to live here; not to mention many Chinese migrants from mainland China to Thailand, who came here through Bangkok. Northern Thai and Thai-Chinese merchants from southern Thailand also migrated here later" (Tangseefa, 2016:p.11).

There is little to no concrete historical evidence in Thailand of Mae Sot's existence as a settlement before its official establishment as a district. Local historical accounts mention the existence of a Karen village named "Panor Kae" that, approximately 140 years ago, occupied the area today known as Mae Sot city. Panor Kae is said to have experienced an expansion due to regional migration which eventually resulted in the Karen being driven out of the village. As the settlement grew Panor Kae was officially renamed and promoted to Mae Sot district in 1898. Located halfway between Yangon and Burma Mae Sot became trade center situated in the middle of the jungle with logging and border trade as its defining characteristics (Pongsawat, 2007). The development of Mae Sot during colonial times is tied to the development of the province it belongs to, Tak, in the same context. While not having been colonized itself, the colonization of neighboring countries pushed the central Siamese state to pursue the creation of a new, geographically bound Siam through administrative reform, shifting from a subsistence economy to

an export economy, and the modernization of forestry policy and practice. In practice this meant that the focus of the state in terms of economic development and infrastructure investment shifted from Tak to the newly annexed Lan Na kingdom (ibid). Tak's marginalization by this new trajectory pursued by the Thai state would shape the conditions of Mae Sot's growth over the next century. The upper western frontier of Siam used to be a major trade route that connected to Chiang Mai the most important city of the Lan Na kingdom and was an important location in the teak industry. It was systematically disconnected from the development plans initiated by the central Siamese state. Once considered a major border outpost it was not connected to the railway system connecting Chiang Mai to Bangkok completed in 1926. The national disinvestment that the area experienced produced a new form of local and regional dynamics.

“The new regional and local dynamic since the beginning of the 20th century of the area could be called the formation of the frontier of the upper northwestern region of Siam where Mae Sot is the urban/regional core. The formation of the modern/disguised frontier means the creation of a space that is situated in the midst of the tension between the "jungle" which implies the space uncontrolled by the central state on the one hand, and the national "forest" which implies the somewhat idealized space that the central government can control, claim, and engage in national resource extraction.” (Pongsawat, 2007:p.401).

In other words the spatial, political and economic development of Mae Sot during the 20th century was strongly shaped by its position as the largest urban center in the newly centralized province of Tak, the regional core of the Thai-Burma frontier region (ibid). Key business associations and government offices that held equal status to those in Tak provincial town, are situated in Mae Sot. The Tak Chamber of Commerce, a provincial level court, the Tak Industrial Council are all located in the Mae Sot district instead of the provincial capital. Additionally the only airport in the province is located in Mae Sot demonstrating its position as the most important city in the province.

An enormous presence of non-Thais in Mae Sot, particularly unauthorized migrants has given it a unique governance system. As Thai city it is subject to the Thai system of governance but as a city of migrants it also accommodates other governing regimes. Through the interactions between these various regimes of governance Burmese migrants without legal status have been integrated into the governance procedures of the city. Given the dependence various sectors of Mae Sot's economy on migrants local, provincial and national state agencies are not able to dismiss non-Thais from their governance activities. In an interview the mayor of Mae Sot declared: "we need to deal with hidden people because they are also

residents of Mae Sot" (Lee, 2008:p.88). Lee likens the Thai governing regime regarding Burmese migrants to a colonial polity except that in this case a small number of indigenous people control the majority of non-citizens. Migrant workers on the border are given "partial citizenship (...) a form of spatial regulation imposed upon an individual body to achieve both border surveillance and the creation of the vulnerable, cheap, and disciplined workers" (Pongsawat, 2007:p.2). The effects of partial citizenship can be aligned with the overlapping dynamics that lead to a position of marginalization: Otherness, Being Unskilled or Low-skilled, and Work Permit (Tangseefa, 2016).

In Mae Sot the strategic use of identity cards by migrants allows for an understanding of the relationship between local state power and the citizenship of minority groups in the border area (Kosem, 2014). Through the politics of identification cards migrant workers daily negotiate their identities with Thai authorities and show how they tolerate, confront and challenge the Thai state by maintaining their mobility and making their own space along the border. The characteristics of Thailand's borders, complex socio-political borderscapes, and laws regarding the mobility of migrants have shaped the flows and patterns of people's migration by situation and context. Migrants are assigned various "types" and "statuses" which determine their ability to cross regional or national borders. The blurring of these categories ultimately is a means for migrants to escape the category of "legal" and "illegal" and maintain their mobility (ibid).

The case of Mae Sot demonstrates there are several actors who take part in governance alongside the state. Many organizations whether international, Thai or Burmese are involved in an implicit administrative system for the migrants (Lee, 2008). Foreign workers who arrive in Mae Sot usually live together in migrant residential compounds which are found all over Mae Sot District. Muslim and some Karen migrants live between themselves in their own compounds. This mainly applies to Karens who are involved in political and social organizations such as the Karen National Union. On the other hand Karens and migrants from other regions who have migrated to find work live in integrated settlements with others regardless of ethnicity. There are still some instances in which migrants from a particular province form a separate compound to live together with other people from that region. A commonality in migrant residential compounds regardless of their variations is that they nurture social ties between their inhabitants by allowing them to retain their village-like lifestyles. In these compounds migrants celebrate seasonal and religious festivals as a community and play sports together. Migrant residential compounds also act as a quasi-administrative unit. The Burmese Migrant Workers Education Committee (BMWEC) acts as an umbrella organization in which migrants compounds are organized (Lee, 2008). As an

organization it oversees the administration of the numerous migrant schools. These schools act as administrative centers in their communities facilitate the organization of people as well as dissemination of information. Basic Burmese-style education is taught at the schools who are usually headed by political activists who were active either in Burma or along the border. Not all Burmese workers in Mae Sot live in migrant compounds and are organized through the schools. While the majority live in compounds domestic workers and shop workers usually take residence in the houses of their employers. Factory workers stay in dormitories provided by the factory and some simply rent rooms with their own money. All these elements show that informal elements exist within Mae Sot and across the Thai-Burma border as well. An implicit and informal structure shapes their patterns of social interaction while the extent to which they are regulated by a formal hierarchy varies (ibid).

The social position that migrant workers occupy in Mae Sot is better understood when considering the factors and contexts in the border that marginalizes them as opposed to seeing them only as a “migrant” in a foreign land. For example state authorities are border actors who make use of the idea of “citizenship” as a means of control to benefit from migrants at checkpoints through extortion. People who live on the border as migrants are reminded of their otherness in their everyday lives when interacting with state actors along the border in police and military checkpoints. The concept of citizenship cannot explain by itself how migrants have become marginalized but through the lens of “intersectionality” the conditions through which it occurs emerges. Kosem analysed the intersectionality of ethnicity and citizenship in border markets in Mae Sot to argue that the two concepts are directly related to the role of market capitalism and the state. The market was a space in which citizenship and the state was contested and also a space of confrontation between ethnic groups. This dynamic re conceptualizes “otherness” as “internal borders” as seen by the boundaries found within the state, migrant communities, and markets which migrants experience in their day to day lives. In other words “otherness” and the associated marginalization is produced not only by state actors policies but also by migrants themselves (Kosem, 2010). The neo-liberal ideas with which the Thai state focused on the development of the country failed in the case of migrant workers and led to their marginalization. As other developing countries tried to commodify their labour, the Thai state produced various identity cards to document and control non-Thai labour while restricting their mobility and job opportunities. Laungaramsri defined Mae Sot as a “concentration camp” in which migrants are “prisoners of labor” who are quarantined by the “government of paper” all of which goes against the market mechanisms and the natural flow of labor found within capitalism (Laungaramsri, 2017).

Thailand's positioning in regionalisation initiative will have an impact on the lives of migrant workers. Initiatives such as the ASEAN Economic Zone and the IMTTH show that Thailand sees opportunity in regionalisation for economic growth from increased cross-border trade as a result of greater institutional and infrastructural connectivity. These initiatives undertaken by ASEAN countries show a desire to reduce geographic and geopolitical borders to "strengthen" their bargaining position as a group in an increasingly multi-polar world with actors such as China and India playing more significant roles. A border is a spatial area in which two states are intertwined by the transnational forces of people, culture and capital (Tangseefa, 2016). When discussing cross-border dynamics between two countries the relationship between economic dimensions and cultural and political dimensions needs to be considered. The relationship between Mae Sot, its economic boom and the marginalization of foreign migrant workers has political dimensions such as border partial citizenship which in itself is tied to the historic status of migrants as the Other in Thai culture. Thus, an awareness of the interplay between the economical, the cultural and the political are necessary when studying the policies of the Thai state towards Burmese migrant workers on the Thai-Burmese border and its impacts. To conceptualize the interplay between these dimensions Tangseefa proposes an overlapping of three geographies: the juridical map, a map of allegiance and a capital map (ibid). The juridical map visualizes a state's efforts to demarcate, survey and secure its borders in order to maintain its territorial integrity. A map of allegiance shows that people living on the border do not necessarily declare allegiance to their host country, resulting them in being considered the Other in the eyes of locals. Capital flows "where it can make the most profit...hence, the geography of money can either join hands with the judicial map and/or destabilize it" (Tangseefa, 2016:p.10).

B. Migration in the Thailand-Burma Borderlands

The history of pre-colonial migration in the Thai-Burma borderlands requires an examination of the spatial system of the region at the time. In those times the sovereignty and territorial organization of Siam and Burma was based on the loyalty of village head/township lord to a kingdom as opposed to a boundary line. Rather than interpreting the cross-border region through the modern notion of a demarcated border line that clearly and totally separates two adjacent spaces it is best seen as a "zone that contained various settlements under the frontier township. It was the loyalty of the local township lord to the major kingdom that is more important to the territorial organization than a clear boundary and

movement of the people across the border” (Pongsawat, 2007:p.106). Wars between kingdoms would shape these frontier townships into buffer zones and maintain them as such. There was a flexibility in movement between the buffer zones as they were divided by an unbounded border. However this is not to say that this unbounded border was total in its porosity or that the flows of cross-border activity were fluid.

A small town for much of its history, in the past half century three phases of cross-border activity and migration have shaped Mae Sot into a city. In the first phase, from the 1960’s to the 1980’s, Burma was essentially closed to the outside world following a military takeover. This resulted in Mae Sot becoming the main entry point for a growing black market that included drug and human trafficking complemented by its location in the “Golden Triangle”. The lucrative nature of controlling the black market attracted ethnic militias and local Thais from other parts of Thailand, particularly Bangkok (Pongsawat, 2007).

In the second phase, towards the end of the 1980’s, the long standing conflict between the Burmese military and ethnic militias along the border intensified leading to many refugees from eastern Burma crossing the border. Starting in 1948 and currently ongoing, the internal conflict has resulted in an estimated 130’000 casualties and 600’000 to 1’000’000 civilians displaced (Political Economy Research Institute, 2011). Many of those displaced traveled to Thailand to find refuge. Over time the Burmese military took control from border areas once dominated by ethnic rebels and set up military bases along the borderland. Hundreds of thousands of people displaced by the fighting that had crossed into Thailand were unable or unwilling to return to their homes due to the presence of these bases. Not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee convention Thailand established what it termed temporary shelter areas along the borderland in 1984 to accommodate what it and the UN terms “Internally Displaced Persons (IDP)” instead of “refugee” many of whom remain in these camps to this day. The presence of large numbers of IDPs led to numerous humanitarian organizations from around the world setting up branches in Mae Sot in order to support them (Tangseefa, 2016). In the past decade the intensity of the civil war decreased, 8 of the 15 rebel factions signing the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. Conflict still occurs with the remaining factions but at a lower intensity than in previous decades. However the flow of Burmese people entering Thailand continued due to other push factors factors within Burma such arbitrary taxation of villagers, crop quotas, forced labor and land confiscation (Aung, 2014). Reports by NGO’s such as the Karen Human Rights Group and the Network for Human Rights Documentation detail how villagers, when faced with a scarcity of land, an inability to work their fields due to forced recruitment by the army

for hard labor, rendering them unable to pay taxes to the authorities to the army, many choose to flee elsewhere (ibid). Thus many migrants cross the border from the Burmese side to the Thai side not only for an improvement in their financial situation but also to escape from the abuses perpetrated by the Burmese government just described. Furthermore regionalisation initiatives such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway (IMTTH)², the planned third Special Economic Zone³ in Mae Sot and other projects have created a greater demand for migrant workers in Mae Sot translating more job opportunities in Thailand compared to Burma where the pace of industrialization is slower.

For much of the 1990's to the early 2000s (the third phase) the stagnation of Burma's economy and Thailand's economic boom became the push and pull factors that drew over two million economic migrants from Burma to Thailand (Aung, 2012). Having regained control of their border regions the military junta opened up their economy and borders to trade. In this period where the economic gap between the two countries widened many economic migrants came to Mae Sot from Burma in search of a better livelihood. At the same time refugees who left the camps or chose to bypass them altogether also came to Mae Sot to seek asylum. The substantial influx of economic migrants and refugees into Mae Sot caused a population growth that would alter its economic and social conditions. From 1993 to 2009 the number of factories increased from 118 to 300 due to large pool cheap foreign labor. Registered Burmese factory workers increased from 3708 in 1993 to 40.000 in 2010. The total number of migrants however was estimated to be 200.000 when including those who are unregistered, highlighting the significant unauthorized migration that occurs in the city (Lee, 2011). Today Mae Sot remains one of the major entry points to Thailand and beyond for Burmese migrants. The continuous ebb and flow of people is one of its defining characteristics and is reflected in its societal formation. Some migrants see Mae Sot as a final destination, a small cosmos not too far from home and shares some similarities to it. For others migrants Mae Sot is a temporary base, a stepping stone to better opportunities elsewhere, be it big cities or third countries they wish to resettle in (ibid).

² *The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway is a highway that will connect Moreh, India to Mae Sot, Thailand. It is hoped to boost trade between the countries and when completed it will be 1400km long. There are proposals to extend this route to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.*

³ *The Mae Sot Special Economic Zone is one of the 14 sub-districts that compose the Tak Special Economic Development Zone. A 1'073'600 square meter industrial estate development project is underway. It is likely that migrant workers will build the industrial estate and work there.*

Chapter 3: Border Partial Citizenship in Mae Sot

A. A Definitional Framework

Immigrant workers from Burma are vital to Thailand's economy, particularly the Thai-Burma cross-border region. The creation of what Pongsawat calls a regime of border partial citizenship (BPC) to control the flow of immigrant labour through partial citizenship was done by the Thai state to ensure a means of entitlement, control and exploitation. To make a population as exploitable and vulnerable as possible certain forms of regulation need to be created which would maximize profit through the prevention of mobility, employment and welfare provision. Pongsawat uses the term "border partial citizenship" to specify the combined spatial impact of state, economic and social formations in Thailand on migrant workers who play an important role in the economic growth of the border region. Their presence is necessary for various sectors in the regional economy such as construction, agriculture, the service sector and more. Given this influence Pongsawat argues that the partial citizenship of migrants in the cross-border region has a tremendous impact on urban development trajectories along the Thai-Burma border. In fact it is this partial citizenship regime that "provides the nature of specificity of cross-border regional development at the Thai-Burma region" (Pongsawat, 2007:p.141). There are two systems of partial citizenship in Thailand: the minority immigrant regime and the the registered illegal migrant worker regime. The impact of these regimes is the surveillance over mobility of the population at the border crossing and border area to the rest of the country. This surveillance system structures the economic activity in Mae Sot and the Thai-Burma border.

The minority immigrant regime started to be practiced in the early 1970's. It was the identification of "minority groups" in the border population through surveillance and the assignment of colored cards. Minority groups is officially defined by the Thai government as "those who live at the border or illegally enter Thailand but lived under the classification and control by the Ministry of Interior (...) Each group is registered and assigned a color card that signifies its entitlement status which varies among groups"(Pongsawat, 2007:p.167). In the 1990's the system became more comprehensive and classified 16 types of minority immigrants. In Thailand the status of "minority immigrant" is different from that of the conventional immigrant as stipulated in the Immigration Act of 1979. A conventional immigrant is defined as an a non Thai nationality person who enters into Thailand. This person must obtain permission before entering the country and if they want to work they must apply for the respective permit. Should illegal immigration occur the alien is either not allowed to enter the country or is arrested, jailed and

deported. Where the minority immigrant differs from the conventional immigrant is that the state declares, by a process of registration, that the alien entered the country with no immigration evidence or without entering at a designated point of entry, therein lies the partiality of this regime. As minority immigrants they are not allowed to move out of their registered area without the permission of the state. If a conventional illegal immigrant is found they will be arrested, jailed and deported as stipulated by the Immigration Act. A registered minority immigrant on the other hand will be documented and "temporarily" allowed to live in a designated area while waiting deportation or be allowed residency as one of the 16 categories of minority immigrant without being eligible for full citizenship, making them a border partial citizen. The border partial citizen is subject to both temporal and spatial confinement. Temporal confinement takes the form of the period of permission to stay (ex. one day visa) and spatial confinement takes the form of requiring permission to move beyond certain registered provinces (Pongsawat, 2007).

The registered illegal migrant worker regime is a form of labor formation in Thailand. Registered Illegal Immigrants are classified as illegal immigrant workers by the Ministry of Labor. Since they are not able to engage in a legal contract or move freely they are what Pongsawat calls "the factor of production made real not attached with any citizen status (...) almost free of any welfare obligation from the state and economy. (...) It is the production of the worker as a flexible existence that is crucial for exploitation as the heart of this new capitalist economy"(Pongsawat, 2007:p.190). In order to exploit most efficiently, the development of labor as an economic worker with political and social rights as a national citizen must be suppressed. What makes below minimum wages and excessive overtime possible is an institutional arrangement by both the Thai state and economy to make the worker vulnerable from the moment they were registered. The category of Registered Illegal Immigrant Workers was developed in 1996 and bypassed the registration process of previously discussed 16 types of minority immigrants. The difference between these two regimes is that this new category does not require the state to provide citizenship rights, immigrant rights or welfare. Pongsawat argues that the partiality of this regime is revealed in the way "citizenship and immigrant issues were bypassed and rearticulated as a pure factor of production under the control of the state and the employer" (Pongsawat, 2007:p.194).

B. Motivations

As mentioned in the previous section the primary motivation for the creation of partial citizens on the Thai-Burmese border is to take advantage of the flow of immigrant labour from Burma to create an exploitable workforce that has limited economic, spatial, and legal freedom. The “push and pull” model often used to understand the presence of migrant workers in Mae Sot generally attributes the availability of cheap labor in the area as the outcome of geopolitical changes in the area (push) and the transformation of Thailand's economy which demanded cheap labor (pull) (Charoenloet, 2015). Pongsawat argues that the availability of cheap labor in Mae Sot was being produced by the regime of border partial citizenship which is a negotiation between the business community, the security offices of the Thai state and resistance by illegal immigrant workers (Pongsawat, 2007). He advanced his argument with 5 central points:

1. The growth of industry in Mae Sot did not begin with the 1988 “constructive engagement policy” but rather with the increased flow of capital in Mae Sot. An investment promotion initiative with the purpose of de-industrializing the Bangkok area due to industrial congestion offered tax exemption privileges to those who invested in one of three investment promotion areas, Tak being the third area. Additionally, countries where textile and garment export quotas were cut moved their investments to Thailand in order to take advantage of their quota system and subsequently became major investors in the area.
2. Migration patterns from Burma to the Thai border are not uniform. After the Karen National Union (KNU) lost its headquarters in Manerplaw in the 1990's towards the end of the civil war a large movement of migrants towards Thailand began. The Burmese government did not declare the situation to be a civil war which meant that the UNHCR could not begin the refugee process to send migrants to a third country or establishing a refugee camp. As a result of this specific situation the UNHCR created the category of “Displaced Person” and through coordination with the Thai Ministry of Interior set up temporary asylums which are in practice refugee camps but cannot be called so because Thailand did not ratify the UN convention on refugees. The porosity of these shelters, and their proximity to Mae Sot, contributed to an increasingly large number of illegal workers in the area. These illegal workers were hired by the industrial, agricultural and service sector, particularly in Mae Sot. Pongsawat argues that the creation of the “Displaced Person” as well as the temporary shelters created a situation in which people who were not legally allowed to work in the area (i.e. displaced persons) were coming in increasing numbers

looking for work. In other words their creation institutionalized and intensified the large number of illegal migrant workers trying to find employment.

3. To work in Mae Sot requires one to have the necessary skills to operate machines, such as in the garment and textile sector. Those who are unable to work in these sectors will end up working in the agricultural sector which is less desirable due to seasonal employment. The employers must register their labor with the government but the registration process discourages them to do so because the registration cost is based on the assumption that the labor must be employed for a year. Consequently the agricultural sector employs more illegal immigrant workers compared to other sectors. However this dynamic is also prevalent in other sectors where the cost of registration of labor is considered a hindrance by employers. This results in employers keeping their workers illegal because they would remain cheap and exploitable labor.
4. It is a common practice in factories for employers to keep their workers confined within the factory. This is in part because factory owners may desire production around the clock to meet deadlines but also to ensure that a police inspection will not hinder the meeting of that deadline by arresting their workers. It is legal for immigration police to arrest Registered Illegal Workers from Burma if they are not physically in the workplace where they are registered. While this is a common practice it is also common of them to allow the workers to walk and live in the city or area outside their factory. Fundamentally what factories need from their workforce is a degree of discipline in order to continue the exploitative production process. Cheap labor is not only about low wages however but also about depriving the workforce of the economic and political freedom to change their employment conditions either by moving to another factory or by fighting for better benefits from their employers and the state. Thus the already discussed tendency of employers to keep the registration cards of workers. The combination of these elements put migrant workers in a position in which they have limited options to deal with an exploitative situation in their factory and limited freedom outside the factory because of their border partial citizenship.
5. There are cultural factors which hinder a close relationship between local Thais and migrant workers from Burma. Historically Burmese people have been considered a national enemy up until the early 20th century. In the process of nation building during the twentieth century Thailand consistently produced a discourse of homogeneity in which those who did not fit the notion of Thai-ness were the “other”. As a result this discourse placed Burmese (and people from Laos, Cambodia or local hill tribes) below Thais in the social ladder and “outside” of their

society. Language also acts as a barrier towards cultural understanding between the Thai and the Burmese in Mae Sot.

C. Border Partial Citizenship in practice

Moe Moe (not her real name) is from Pagu state and arrived in Mae Sot twenty years ago. Her father was a government worker in the mining department and her mother didn't work. She stayed with her family until she graduated and became a teacher. After her parents passed away she fell ill and could not work for a while. In need of money she moved to Rangoon and worked at a factory producing soy sauce. One day she met someone who said they had contacts in Mae Sot and could get her work there for 25000 Kyat. Taking her offer she paid and travelled to Mae Sot. The factory was small, not more than 100 yards, the factory store, toilet, kitchen and bathroom was located downstairs while the dormitories were located upstairs. Due to their status as illegal migrants they could not leave the factory grounds. Doing so risks arrest by the police. If they needed to go shopping the factory store sold soap and shampoo but not food. In the mornings and evenings someone would come to serve breakfast and dinner to the workers. With no chance to go anywhere she spent three months in the factory. She felt it was like living in a prison. Moe Moe prefers her current job at another factory. There her employer pays for half of her work permit but this half is partially deducted for her salary every month. The factory management also keeps their forms of identification letting the migrants carry a copy with them, which is not recognized by police. In comparison to her previous factory Moe Moe has more freedom. They can go where they please occasionally and the factory has entertainment facilities such as TV and a video player. The workers are also provided health insurance. If they need to go to the hospital, they inform the manager and he or she will arrange the transport. While the employer does not organize any festivals or religious celebrations for the workers he allows them to organize and celebrate it.

Moe Moe's story encapsulates that of other migrant workers from Burma who I interviewed and is indicative of how BPC takes shape in their day to day lives. Border partial citizenship being a

negotiation between migrants, state actors, and economic actors I oriented my focus group questions towards the relationship immigrant workers have with manifestations of the latter two that are most present in their daily life: the police, employers, and documentation. These relationships are the areas in which we can see border partial citizenship in practice. While transcribing the collected data I was struck by the extent to which these three relationships overlap in the majority of the interviews. At times elements from the three relationships would sometimes appear in the same sentence: “Some people don’t have any document but they still don’t have to worry about the police because the employer takes responsibility for their security.” (Interview 3). Thus it should be noted that a discussion of one relationship will often bring in elements from the other two. These relationships warrant further research as they are intertwined with the legal, economical, spatial and social positions of migrant workers and inform their experiences and perceptions of these positions.

Documentation



Various forms of documentation used in Mae Sot. Photo: Stanley Nosten

Frequently changing policies regarding migrant workers makes it difficult for Burmese migrant workers to legally stay and work in Thailand without the risk of deportation. For example the most recently implemented rule that was mentioned by the migrant workers interviewed, stipulates that migrant workers who are in possession of a temporary pink identification card have to register certificates of identity (CI) to get a passport and Thai visa. If they do not register for a work permit within 15 days their status will be illegal and they will risk deportation. However this new policy was not always well received by the employers. “But in our factory our employer did not mention this because the policy requires for those who do not have CI to obtain CI and those who have citizen identity must have passport. And in order to have passport the employer must bring the worker to Bangkok. But they think it is far from reality, they cannot do it”(Interview 3). At times the cost of legally acquiring the required documents for them to work and stay in Thailand is beyond their financial means. For this reason some choose to hire brokers, forge documents or bribe factory owners to do what is necessary to stay in Thailand. When using a broker as an intermediary to obtain legal documents or register as legal workers migrants report facing significantly higher costs. A registration process that is said to cost 300 baht (8.69 euro) jumps to 3000 baht (86.86 euro) with a broker. When asked why they use a broker the main reasons given was an inability to speak Thai and a distrust of interacting with officials. Before conducting the interviews I imagined brokers to be a network of criminals that preyed on the desire of migrant workers to have a better life. While it is possible this may be the case to a degree I was surprised to find out that most brokers the interviewees interacted with were usually acquaintances from their own villages in Burma that they knew and trusted. Some of those interviewees said that when asked by the police for their papers they show ID cards that associate them with a certain organization such as an NGO, a church or a school are sometimes used by migrants to avoid arrest. For example, a former student of mine from a migrant school in Mae Sot recounted his experiences with the police “I have a passport but when I live here I don't need it. If police saw me I wouldn't show it to them because I don't have a visa so I just show them my student ID” (Interview Yaung Chi Oo).

The documentation that a migrant worker possesses influences how they are treated by the police. Lack of documentation is a common cause of arrest for migrant workers by police in Mae Sot because, according to a number of interviewees, the local police primarily seek migrants who do not have any documentation in order to extort money from them by making them pay fines. The migrants interviewed who have a legal status reported experiencing significantly less harassment from the police in the past years. Conversely those who were interviewed and did not have any legal documents reported an increase in harassment by the police. Thus for those with work permits it is possible to travel within Mae Sot

without having to worry about the police. For example it is possible for all the migrant employees of Moe Moe's factory to travel around freely because their employer has a policy of only employing those with a work permit. All of the migrant workers interviewed during the fieldwork who expressed being able to travel freely outside their house said they were only able to do so because of their work permit. Moving freely within Mae Sot, not being harassed by the police and the right to health care are the main reported benefits of having a work permit. On the other side of the spectrum those who did not have work permits reported that they did not leave their houses and do not travel far from their community from fear of arrest or extortion from the police. Whether they had a work permit or not the participants of the focus group reported not being able to travel freely out of Mae Sot due to their migrant status. However it is possible for those with work permits to travel outside of Mae Sot with the documented consent of their employers and the local government.

There are minor differences in how the documentation status of migrant workers affects their treatment by their employers. The interviewees who were legal and had documentation describe experiencing the common practice among factory owners to hold their passports and working permits of their employees, leaving them in a similar situation of spatial confinement as the undocumented though to a lesser degree. Aside from the benefits of having a work permit mentioned above the migrant worker will face below minimum wage salaries, mandatory overtime, and lax enforcement of the laws protecting their rights whether they have a work permit or not. While it is common practice for workplaces to hold the legal documents of their workers some interviewees described some employers refusing to return their documents upon request. The reason given for this is because visa and work permits are provided through the employer. Technically employers must pay for half of the price of the work permits but many choose to instead deduct this cost from the workers salary. Thus employers justify withholding the legal documents of their workers as an insurance of their continued presence in their factory because if an employee leaves they become a Burmese immigrant with no legal status in Mae Sot and a easy target for the police.

The policies regarding the registration and legalization of migrant workers has changed frequently, almost every year. (Reddy, 2015). Despite pressure from the government to decrease the number of undocumented migrant workers the pattern of employers and migrant workers not going through the registration process for various reasons has been consistent throughout the years, the degree of which varies by sector. The primary reason for not registering is the perceived lack of benefit. To migrants, while being fully documented is desirable, the cost of applying for work permits can be beyond

their financial means (Lee, 2007). Additionally some migrants are hesitant to participate in the registration system as they are concerned that the relaying of their information from Thai officials to Burmese officials may lead to adverse consequences to their families in Burma. (Ministry of Labour-Thailand, 2009). In the case of small businesses and farms the reason for not registering can range from the permit fees being unaffordable or they are simply unwilling to pay (Arnold, 2007). The businesses who do pay commonly deduct the cost from the salaries of the workers and withhold the original permit from their workers do it as a form of “control” over them to avoid their departure before the fee for their work permit has been repaid (Lee, 2011).

The subject of undocumented migrants in Thailand has extensively been written about in relation to many other topics. On the dynamic between the documentation status of migrant workers and the police factory raids are the most commonly discussed (Arnold, 2007; Aung, 2014; IMO, 2015). On a near monthly basis the police conducts raids in factories looking for undocumented workers. Some employers forcibly deduct from the salary of undocumented migrants to pay bribes to the police to ensure that they are not arrested though in many cases the migrant workers were still arrested (Meyer, 2014). In addition to factory raids the police also sets up checkpoints in areas where undocumented migrants are known to travel to such as clinics (Aung, 2014). As a response to these challenges migrants employ various tactics to avoid arrest and deportation. For example in Mae Sot the situations in which migrants have to furnish documentary evidence to prove their identity and legal status are numerous whether it be to an employer, at a police checkpoint or in a court of law. When stopped by police the documents they present range from legally valid such as work permits, passports, identity cards to legally invalid such as school identification cards or cards issued by NGOs found along the border. Despite some of these documents not being legally valid when presented to local authorities they suffice to grant migrants passage indicating an unspoken acceptance and recognition which gives its owners a certain degree of protection (Reddy, 2015).

Variation in documentation status of migrant workers is present across different sectors. Factory workers are more likely to have documented migrants while the agricultural and labour sector have a higher number of undocumented migrants in comparison. Nevertheless it is estimated that the majority of migrant workers (75-80%) in Mae Sot do not have documentation (Lee, 2007; Aung, 2014; IOM, 2015). The causes for this variation is in part due to the nature of the work. As agricultural work is seasonal employers do not need workers throughout the year making them unwilling to pay for a work permit that would last for a year. From a macro perspective the living and working conditions of Burmese migrant workers are similar even when taking variation in documentation status into account.

Nevertheless, between the fully documented, those with temporary documentation and the undocumented the latter has the least favorable situations when considering indicators such as “hours of work, job satisfaction, living conditions and access to health and education”. Interestingly when using the aforementioned indicators the IOM found that their results indicated a slightly better situation for migrants with temporary documentation as opposed to their counterparts who have full documentation (IOM, 2015).

Police

The relationship between migrants and police in Mae Sot can be summed up as a cat and mouse game with evasion, abuse, arrest and monetary extortion as its defining traits. These aforementioned characteristics were frequently brought up in various discussions and interviews when addressing the subject of police. To ascertain the nature of their relationship the question of how local authorities and migrant workers perceive one another is important. The data from my fieldwork points towards a monetization of illegal migrant workers by Thai police in the form of financial extortion, bribes and bail money. This indicates monetary gain as being a significant element in how illegal migrant workers are perceived by the local state agents.

One story in particular stood out to me. I knew that extortion of money from migrants was commonplace but never fathomed that Thai police would resort to kidnapping a Burmese national for money. A social worker at a NGO in Mae Sot spoke about the experience of a Karen friend with the police. “It was a friend who wasn’t a migrant worker but she’s Karen person with Burmese passport. One time she was trying to go to Chiang Mai and she had to attend some kind of conference but she was stopped at the checkpoint outside of Mae Sot. She is politically involved with KNU and other organisations. So she has travelled to different countries. But the claim of the police that stopped her that day was that her passport was fake. To which she said “Ok, take me to the immigration van and get me deported”. But they didn’t. What they did was – they just put her in the back of the car and they drove around, and they threatened her. Since she doesn’t speak Thai the police officer had a Burmese guy who speaks Thai who was just a translator. So then she called one of her friends and told her that this had happened to her. I called the police officer and told him that I’m a friend of this woman and she has a real passport. But what they did... they were asking for 50.000 Baht (1447.65 euro) in exchange for release. But they would not return any documents such as [her] passport. So somehow they worked out a deal.

And my friend managed to find someone to drop the money, somewhere near the Friendship Bridge. But I kept calling that police man and said “You arrested my friend and can you tell me which station she is if I want to follow up”. But he did not reveal that and hung up. And I called him again... I spoke Thai by the way. I said if we deliver the money you have to release my friend and her documents because that’s the agreement. He hung up. I think I called him three times. In the end the guy who went to drop the money and waited for him at the Friendship Bridge on the Thai side. He called that guy and said “Look, here’s your money here’s your friend, I don’t want to deal with this” and just left. So that was my friend’s experience. But I already know this is not right what they’re doing. So I think this is one of the big events I came across but day to day... I see them everywhere stopping migrant workers on a bicycle, getting 20 or 30 Baht. Or even when they’re traveling on public transport. Every day. In a way it doesn’t directly affect me but it isn’t like I haven’t seen it.”(Interview 5)

An interview from Tangseefa’s research on the Mae Sot Special Economic Zone further illustrates the monetary nature of the migrant/police dynamic. “In January/February [2014], Zin Min Naing had been arrested for illegal immigration. Police had asked for 2000 baht (57.91 euro) in return for releasing him. Zin Min Naing did not have the money, so they had detained him for 3 days. On the 4th day, the police officers had given him 50 per cent discount. Zin Min Naing had insisted that he had had no money. They had asked him to contact his relatives for help. He had told them that he had been alone and [was just] ... a construction worker. As a result, the police officers had continued to detain him one more day. On the fifth day, the price offered had been lowered to 500 baht (14.48 euro), but Zin Min Naing’s answer remained the same. On the sixth day, he had been released. A police officer gave him 20 baht (0.58 euro) to help him travel back to the construction site. (Phianphachong Intarat: April 21, 2014) (cited in Tangseefa, 2016:3)

Conversely, or perhaps as a consequence, migrant workers perceive the Thai police in a negative light, place little trust in them, and seek minimal interaction. Yet as the following interaction with a Burmese mother and police officer will show there are other elements than monetary gain that explain the actions of police officers towards migrants and how they perceive them. At one of the several checkpoints during my bus trips in which I experimented with not showing my ID card when asked by the police I observed an interaction with a policeman and a young Burmese mother. The policeman came to her seat and asked for her documentation. Clutching her baby she looked at the policeman and did not say a word. The policeman, with a louder voice, repeated his instruction which elicited the same silent response from

the young mother. Deciding not to pursue the matter further he said “Be careful. Be grateful that I won’t do anything to you” and left the bus.

What I saw that day aligned with the only positive trait assigned to the Thai police by the workers I interviewed: that they were more humane than their Burmese counterparts and prefer the consequences of being arrested by the former rather than the latter. In their experience an illegal labourer can be released by Thai police back into Mae Sot while still not having papers instead of being deported. To my amazement every single person involved in the focus group discussions and personal interviews laughed or smiled at the question of whether they feared deportation. Many returned to their homes in Mae Sot in the same day they were deported across the Moei River to Myawaddy. A common joke was that they would arrive home in Mae Sot before the policemen that arrested them did. Almost no one reported physical abuse or murder, only monetary loss. One interviewee did describe witnessing migrants being abused by Thai policemen at a checkpoint. The migrant was spat on and slapped. Nevertheless arrest by the Burmese police was said to have a higher probability of resulting in physical harm or death. The contrast in potential outcomes is a crucial element of how Burmese workers perceive the Thai police. In comparison to being seriously hurt or killed, arrest the possibility of deportation, monetary loss and generally undesirable behavior by Thai police officers is “preferable”.

As previously written over the past few years migrants with work permits have reported less police harassment while undocumented migrants have reported an increase. The documentation a migrant has can influence the outcome of being stopped by police and official access to this document is through an employer. Thus an employer can influence the relationship a migrant has with local police. When police arrest a migrant sometimes an employer will come to pay for their release. The motivations behind this action can vary from altruism to a punishment. Migrant workers who had positive relations with their employers felt that their employers paid for bail because they took care of their employees. Others have reported of employers getting their workers arrested, paying for their release, then deducting the cost of bail from their salary as a punishment. Employers can exploit the predatory nature of migrant-police relations to achieve results they desire with their migrant employees. By using the threat of arrest by police employers push their employees to restrict their movements to their workplace and discourage the promotion of their rights. One factory worker who was experiencing a deteriorating relationship with her employer after having organized strikes left her job out of fear that she would be arrested under false pretenses. Furthermore the sometimes illegal behavior of police towards migrants encourages similar

behavior by employers. In one example a Burmese migrant who was working in a farm asked for payment and was shown a gun instead. Unpaid the young man ran away the same night.

In the relationship between migrants and police, having documentation at hand is key to how police treat migrants but is not the only factor. As it has been established the possession of work permits and NGO cards has been reported to make a difference in the chances of arrest and extortion. The case of the Karen woman with a Burmese passport who was kidnapped by Thai police shows that having a legal document is sometimes not enough. The case of the young Burmese doctor who considered himself an expat and did not experience police harassment sheds light to another aspect of this dynamic. Though in some cases all held the same passport and had the same legal document required to be employed in Thailand, the work permit, it would seem that when it comes to extortion a distinction is made by the police between those employed in certain sectors. During an interview with Mr. Tip, a local politician and former head of administration and logistics at the Shoklo Malaria Research Unit (SMRU), I asked his thoughts on causes of the difference in treatment. He responded that the Burmese doctors working at SMRU are considered as expats and are treated the same as the other foreigners who work there once the police know they work there, by showing their SMRU card or otherwise. My experiment of not showing my ID card in the bus indicates that they decided not to ask me after having looked at me. In summary when making the decision to target a migrant for extortion police look for several indicators: their appearance, their legal status, what documentation they have on their person and who they work for. The rampant practice of employers confiscating their workers legal documents weakens the negotiating position of migrants in their relationship with the police and furthers the reliance of the migrant to the employer.

Thailand's politicians, military and police generally perceive irregular and low-skilled migrants from Burma as illegal aliens who in addition to being detrimental to Thailand's social order and economic security are criminals who also spread diseases (Aung, 2012; Sunpuwan, 2014; Pinkaew, 2015). These institutions often turn a blind eye to the plight of migrants. Police are reluctant to investigate crimes regarding migrants and are sometimes complicit themselves. Violations are not limited to the Thai-Burma border but is also prevalent on the Thai-Lao border and the seaports on the Gulf of Thailand. Reports of monetary extortion, bribes and human rights abuses of migrants by the hands of Thai police has been widely documented. While some employers benefit from police corruption and extortion others are also extorted from themselves particularly when they are unable to comply with a decree regarding migrant workers in time (HRW 2004; HRW 2010; HRW 2018). Human rights violations by police have been

reported to occur at time of arrest, in detention centers and during deportation include beatings, sexual harassment and extortion. There are also additional allegations of police being involved in human trafficking and murder among others (Arnold, 2007). Such a climate of impunity exacerbates the plight of migrants as it further deepens their vulnerability to abuse by employers, authorities or individuals who face little consequences for their actions. Consequently migrant workers perceive the police as a source of rights violations and generally avoid them at all costs unless there is no alternative. As a result when migrants experience criminal behavior the crimes goes unreported to the police as they have little faith in them.

The flow of illegal Burmese immigrants entering Thailand is facilitated by Thai authorities on a daily basis. Everyday people and goods cross the border informally by taking a boat across the Moei River (Pongsawat, 2007; Tangseefa, 2016). While this happens in front of them the Border Patrol Police do nothing to obstruct this traffic implying a degree of silent consent. Furthermore “although Thai migration policy confines migrant workers to either the official or informal channels of migration at any given time, the institutions and procedures for managing both channels are overgrown with a layer of brokerage” (Balčaitė, 2016:p.898). Illegal Burmese immigration is facilitated by the relationship between Thai police and networks of brokers, who often are established migrant workers that have lived and worked in Thailand themselves. Collaboration between the two actors has grown since the 1990’s as a response to increased immigrant flow from Burma and increased efforts in enforcing border control (ibid). Brokers bribe the police in exchange for being able to transport individuals across the border (Meyer, 2014). Additional services include facilitating the registration and renewal of their work and stay permits, obtaining documents and more, all of which usually involve a bribe. The relationship between state agents and brokers extends the dynamics of the borderlands from the periphery to the interior of the country (Balčaitė, 2016). Crackdowns on illegal immigration can lead to migrants increasingly relying on brokers to cross the border which in turn increases their exposure to human trafficking as well as the number of bribes police receive from brokers (HRW, 2018).

Corruption and bribery needs to be examined through comparative approaches. While it is inherently illegal and a burden for Burmese migrants it can also be conducive to enduring life in Mae Sot and the borderlands. “If there is no corruption and bribery, only with transparent and legal enforcement, we cannot stay here. We would be deported to Burma with subsequently more harsh sufferings from the Burmese authorities. [...] The Thai police are at least better and more humane than the Burmese police. They take a part of what we have, but the Burmese police take everything we have and even kill us” (excerpt from interviews in Lee, 2007:p110). The perception and experiences of Burmese migrants

regarding the Thai police is more positive than their perception and experiences than Burmese police. From this point of view bribes to Thai police are a way to avoid the potential dangers and physical threat of being deported and left in the hands of Burmese police.

The migrant-police relationship is strongly influenced by the employer-police relationship. One reason is because the relationship a migrant worker has with the Thai police strongly depends on the documentation the worker possesses which in turn can only be acquired through an employer. Employers have to pay a large sum to register their immigrant workers in addition to travelling to Bangkok. In comparison local employment or illegal immigrant employment costs less even when including the cost of bribes to the police for each illegal immigrant employed. Thus the willingness of an employer to shoulder the financial costs of registration determines whether a Burmese worker will have a work permit which in turn determines the likelihood of arrest and extortion by police (Pongsawat, 2007). The practice of withholding ID cards and passports of Burmese employees is often a consequence of registration. Employers seek to protect their investment in such a way to dissuade their workers from running away. The result of this practice is that even their legal workers become subject to arrest. If a Burmese immigrant with a work permit is arrested they are dependent on their employer coming to the detention center to tell the police they are legal workers (Campbell, 2017).

Employers are regularly supported by local officials and employer organizations are influential with government agencies, even sharing the same office building (Arnold, 2007). Without the presence of corruption the illegal practices of some employers towards migrant workers would not have endured and become systemic. Indeed these crimes are driven and sustained by collusion between corrupt officials and employers (Sakdiyakorn, 2010). Though these relations are often mutually beneficial employers can also be the target of monetary extortion by the Thai police themselves, particularly those who employ illegal migrant workers. Such employers are extorted by bribes paid officials according to the number of illegal workers they employ and the payment for the release of arrested illegal workers (Pongsawat, 2007).

Within the migrant-police relationship the identity card is a state artifact that is used as a political tool of control by the Thai state through bureaucratic practices. It is not only an official form of identification but also represents the ideology of 'Thainess' (Pinkeaw, 2015). A common narrative heard on Thai media surrounding migrant workers and displaced people, depicts them as threats to national security, criminals, and to incur health risks. Consistently "otherizing" the Burmese through this stigmatization is a tactic employed by the Thai state by using its influence to justify the continuation of its surveillance and control

of the migrant population (ibid). Pongsawat's Border Partial Citizenship' is the development of Ong's 'Flexible Citizenship' concept. It conceptualizes the manner in which different limited rights are conferred to migrant workers in the Thai-Burma borderlands. These rights are given and denied depending on the permutations of the times as well as the ways in which they crossed the border and did or did not undergo one of various kinds of registration. Pongsawat argues that this blurring of migrants legal statuses is an intentional action by the Thai state (Pongsawat, 2007). These complex ID card and registration management processes by different state agencies are a low-tech but effective means of surveillance that also insert cultural politics into the day to day lives of migrants on the border (Kosem, 2014). While state mechanisms such as identity cards are used as a tool of surveillance and control it is also used by the displaced Burmese to negotiate with state actors as well as improve their relationship with Thai society and the Thai state (Reddy, 2015). "Identity cards are both a channel through which the migrants confront, tolerate, and sometimes challenge the Thai state, and a mechanism that allows the Thai regime to penetrate and control communities from Burma spatially and territorially on the border" (Kosem, 2014:p.1).

Identity cards represent an intersection between the borderland, migration and identity. Their use gives migrants some strategic flexibility in the management of their travelling and/or border-crossing patterns, which in turn make them "illegible" through the lens of legality and illegality as they are illegal migrants using documents that are legally invalid in theory but quasi accepted by state actors in practice. The use of ID cards by migrants and state authorities "against" one another illustrates the tense relations between the two (ibid). Thus documentation plays an important role in the migrant-police relationship, which is a subset of the migrant-state relationship. It is a tool used by both sides to negotiate with one another.

Employers

When asked about their experiences in their workplace the various testimonies gathered show that the manner in which migrant workers are treated depends on the temperament of the employer rather than existing laws. In an interview with a workers rights association their representative summarized the different approaches of employers: "Some pay below minimum but give accommodation like food and place to sleep. Some places do pay minimum wage but then do not give accommodation like place to stay or food". During my research on previous works regarding the experience of migrant workers in their workplace the subject of how they were treated by their employers was generally talked about in a negative light that emphasized underpayment and abuse with little mention of positive behavior. While

some interviewees certainly did experience the negative treatment which were written about, some talked highly of their employer and others were indifferent. The experience of one migrant worker was that all of her employers looked down on her and discriminated against her. Nevertheless her employers still paid for her release when she was arrested. From our discussions it seemed to me that the behavior of the various employers could be placed on a spectrum. On one end there are employers who treat them well: they pay their workers the legal minimum of 300 baht a day and will give money to their employees to go to the clinic to get treated or bail them or their family members out. On the other end there are those who treat them badly: they pay well below the minimum wage or do not pay at all and have threatened their workers with violence or deportation. Finally in between these two ends there are those who are indifferent as long as quotas are met: they pay below minimum wage and do not treat them badly but make them work hard. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents were paid below the minimum wage, were working in low-skilled and their feelings towards their employers were either neutral or negative.

Perhaps the most important source for a general overview of relations between employers and migrant workers came from a discussion with a representative of the Yaung Chi Oo Workers Association (YCOWA). While the stories told by migrant workers provided an individual's perspective that of the YCOWA provides an insight into emerging trends due to their years of experience of working with migrant workers. A recent trend that the YCOWA has noticed is that fewer migrant workers are coming to them for their services when they are mistreated by their employer. The main reason referred to is that people do not want to take the time to settle their problems in court because they have to work and earn money. Another reason is that it is relatively easy for migrant workers to find a new job in another factory as more and more are opening. Given this opportunity few take the time to settle their grievances in court. In the perspective of YCOWA this dynamic gives employers little incentive to respect workers rights given the lack of consequences and an abundance of willing replacements should a worker leave. Even if their workers are legal and registered employers will pay them below minimum wage and have their documentation withheld. However, according to the YCOWA representative, the latter practice is happening less often with registered workers.

When asked what they would do if they were arrested many migrants said they their first reaction was to call their employer. It has also been the experience of some to get help from their employer for their family members who have been arrested who do not work for the employer. If they have prior knowledge of a police raid employers tend to warn their workers and assist them while they are in hiding. When I asked if this was done out of concern for them or out of a desire to protect their labour most

replied that it is the latter. On the other hand the threat of arrest as a management strategy weighs on the mind of migrants. When an interviewee organized a demonstration for higher pay her employers picked on her and made her feel unwelcome. She resigned so as to avoid being tricked and put into jail for false reasons.

Sometimes employers are the ones who approach migrants for work and offer them the possibility of having documentation. Other times employers are approached by migrants to falsely employ them and provide them with a work permit and visa. One interviewee described the process. After retrieving her passport from her workplace she looked for an employer who would act as a broker to acquire a work permit. She paid the broker 7500 baht (217.15 euro) after which he asked her to do a blood test. After receiving the receipt and results of the blood test they went to immigrant together to extend her visa. Finally the employer went to an office without the worker and returned to her with a 2 year work permit and visa.

The practice by employers of underpaying their migrant workers, forcing them to do overtime, deducting from their wages for rent and electricity has consistently been documented and contradicts Thai labour laws. A justification given by employers regarding the low wages include financial constraints and that other countries pay migrant workers below the minimum wage (Arnold, 2007). A 2015 IOM study found that the majority of migrant workers in Thailand do not receive food or accommodation from their employers. There was little difference in who received food and accommodation between fully documented immigrants (12.67%), undocumented migrants (12.95%) and those who had colored cards the percentage of workers (13.46%) (IOM, 2015). Additionally the same study found that “close to half of the fully documented migrants and those with coloured cards surveyed earned enough income from their employment to cover their necessary expenses, while over two thirds of undocumented migrants and those with temporary documents did not always earn enough to cover their expenses” (idib). Despite this most migrants, across all documentation statuses, reported feeling “neutral” or “satisfied” with their jobs. The primary motivations of migrants for leaving Burma is to find a higher income and a lack of employment satisfaction. Having found both may explain the feeling of general satisfaction despite the difficulties of living and working in Thailand. The study concluded that their data indicated a positive correlation between job satisfaction and economic motivation to migrate because “for most migrants, positive migration experiences primarily derived from employment satisfaction” (IOM, 2015:p.33).

In Thailand it is not the labor office responsible for registering illegal migrant workers but the local police that have the authority to search and inspect factories. This arrangement leaves a significant room for negotiation between local police officers and factory owners (Pongsawat, 2007). For example employers pay a “fee” to local police of for the number of illegal migrant laborers they employed, thus the higher the number of illegal workers they employ the higher the fee will be. Within this dynamic employers have an incentive to negotiate with local police officers in order to decrease the fee paid. Although employers pay these fees police still arrest and detain workers outside of their workplace and wait for their employers to pay for their release upon proving that the registered migrant laborer was indeed under their employment. This demonstrates that within the migrant-employer-police dynamic the police often have the most power and are in the strongest negotiating position because by default an economic actor has to create and maintain a good relationship with local police in order to have cheap employment (Pongsawat, 2007). This relationship also allows employers to be forewarned about police raids enabling them to evacuate their workplaces and factories ahead of time (Aung, 2014). Doing so benefits both the police and the employer as the former maintains a source of income through bribes and the latter maintains a workforce.

Documentation and its registration process play a significant role in the relationship between migrants and their employers. They are often used as a tool by employers to control, coerce or punish their workers. Employers who do pay for the work permits of their employees commonly deduct the cost from their wages. In order to ensure that the worker would stay until the fee had been repaid employers hold the original permit as an insurance. Consequently legal migrant workers are subject to the same extortion, harassment, and inability to access healthcare as illegal migrant workers (Arnold and Hewinson, 2005). This common practice intentionally restricts the freedom of movement of workers as the probability of arrest or extortion increases without documentation. It also strengthens the negotiating power of employers and increases their workers dependence on them to manage certain situations that involve the police or travel. In the case of undocumented migrant workers employers also use the absence of work permits to their advantage by deducting “security” fees from their wages either for their own benefit or to bribe officials for maintaining unregistered workforces. While fees for accommodations, food, electricity and “security” are illegal they are also a common practice which result in migrants being paid less than the minimum wage (Arnold and Pickles, 2011). The tendency of employers to use a migrants documentation, or lack of one, against them either shifts the power dynamic of the relationship in their favour.

Various factors contribute to a pattern in which employers tend to seek out workers without documentation in their hiring process. Registered migrants with work permits are bound to a single employer and workplace. They are considered temporarily legal while their permits are valid. If the worker does not register again after the work permit ends they will be considered illegal. Since the implementation of the registration systems a minority of migrant workers in Mae Sot are registered in Mae Sot (ibid). This is in part due to employers primarily hiring informal workers as a cost cutting measure to compete for orders from big firms looking to outsource their low value added tasks. Labour laws that govern the informal sector are often not observed by employers with no serious consequences, undermining the bargaining power of workers (Charoenloet, 2014). In other words employers in Mae Sot prefer hiring undocumented workers because they can be paid below minimum wage, avoid paying registration fees and work in illegal conditions.

D. A new form of Border Partial Citizenship?

Several recurring patterns emerged from discussions that belie a shift in dynamics locally between the state and Mae Sot's migrant communities and thus potentially a shift in the regime of border partial citizenship. Many have reported that compared to the past years police conduct less raids on communities and homes and an increase in crackdowns on illegal workers. New policies such as the extension of the one day visa to one week were welcome and seen as a positive step that was beneficial to them. Additionally a new decree about to be implemented specifically addresses the systematic confiscation of legal documents by employers by criminalizing the practice. On the other hand in the same decree the Thai government announced that it would impose penalties of 5 years in prison or fines up to 100000 baht on migrants who were working without a permit, prompting a small exodus of migrants across Thailand. The *Decree Concerning the Management of Foreign Worker's Employment* enacted on June 23, 2017 resulted in tens of thousands of registered and unregistered migrant workers to flee Thailand which in turn elicited strong opposition towards the new decree from employers. Due to this opposition the Prime Minister delayed the enforcement of four articles in relation to the punishments for 180 days while the remaining articles were enacted. As of the 7th of August around 196,000 employers registered 680,000 workers from Burma, Laos and Cambodia without documents registered while another 350,000 applied for new work permits to register changes in employers as required by the new law (HRW, 2017). How this push towards legislation will impact the situation in Mae Sot in the long term remains to be seen as similar attempts have been made in the past yet the number of migrants and

unregistered migrants have increased over the years and non-enforcement of legislation in Mae Sot remains prevalent. It is difficult to concretely assess why these instances have occurred, the motivations behind them and the willingness to enforce these new laws. The official statement made by Prime Minister Prayut regarding the new laws said that they were necessary due to the large number of unregistered migrants, concerns about human trafficking, and bringing the country's labour standards up to par with international standards. Should the Thai government maintain its effort and succeed in consistently decreasing the number of unregistered workers in Thailand this would represent a significant departure from border partial citizenship as it has been practiced over the years where the illegal presence of workers was tolerated and even fostered. A change in border partial citizenship can be seen as a shift in motivation and needs on the part of the government. I wrote to Pitch Pongsawat, the author of the concept of border partial citizenship, and asked him about his thoughts on how it has evolved over the years. His response was that the slight changes in the policy of BPC does not change that it is a system designed to be favorable towards exploitation. He further states that the evolution in the policies of BPC, or in his words "complications", are possibly designed to make the system legible from the states point of view. I agree with Pongsawats views on the matter because exploitation of migrants has indeed remained a central feature of life in Mae Sot for decades and does not seem likely to change in the immediate future given Thailand's continued structural dependence on exploitative labor.

Chapter 4: Migrant Strategies

Hae Wah arrived in Mae Sot in 1998 and has lived there since. Having raised children and gotten married in the city she considers Mae Sot to be her home. She worked in a garment factory as a quality controller where her day began at 8 in the morning and ended at 2AM. Though she admitted it was not sustainable for her health she was happy with the money she was earning compared to her time in Burma. One day she organized a demonstration to ask her employer for more payment. The management was displeased with her. Following an announcement on the radio from an NGO that the factory was forcing workers to go overtime she was summoned by the manager. Though she was not the one who reported the factory to the NGO the management still blamed her and told her if she wished to do overtime she would have to ask for permission. Hae Wah resigned as she felt targeted and that she would potentially be blamed for similar instances in the future putting her at risk of arrest or deportation. She asked for her passport back and said that in a unusual move they returned it to her.

Additionally her children were going to school and her family lived in the compound so she did not want to risk fighting back should the situation reach them. Today Hae Wah stays at home at takes care of the children of other factory workers while they are working. As she is running her own informal business I was surprised to hear that she still has a work permit. Upon clarification she revealed that she had asked an employer, who is also a broker for false employment documentation: a visa and work permit in exchange for 7500 baht (217.15 euro). The visa is valid for two years makes it appear as though he is her employer. After the payment he asked her to get a medical check-up and give him the receipt and the results. He then went to immigration with her and extended her visa. Afterwards he went into an office and at the end of the day he came back and gave her the documents.

This chapter departs from how Burmese migrants in Thailand, and the positions they occupy, are predominantly portrayed in academic literature. Dominant analyses largely frame migrants in the borderlands in the narrow terms of economic migrants who are victims of structural dynamics without factoring their agency in the analysis. Relatively little has been written on what they do in their everyday lives to overcome the challenges of occupying such a position. A closer examination of their day to day actions reveal the significant degree to which overly focusing the forces that marginalize them is insufficient to understanding the position they occupy in Thailand. The substantial measures migrants take to overcome the challenges of institutional marginalization through everyday resistance can be read as a vast critique and repudiation of everyday life with border partial citizenship. A concern with re-politicizing the everyday actions of migrant communities in Mae Sot is that, in focusing on the agency of migrants vis a vis border partial citizenship in Mae Sot one might sideline the genuine concerns migrants have in regards to the illegal, marginalizing and threatening actions of local and state authorities as well as employers. The intention of this chapter is to find a middle ground between foregrounding the agency of migrant communities and acknowledging the marginalizing effects of border partial citizenship. Drawing on Scotts seminal work on everyday resistance strategies among peasants in Southeast Asia, and Aungs application of Scotts work to Burmese migrants in the Thai-Burmese borderland this chapter seeks to accomplish this by considering what migrants do to protect themselves in Mae Sot, through everyday resistance, from the three crucial elements of BPC that are present in their everyday lives: employers, police and documentation. In summary this chapter focuses on migrants self-protection strategies that compose everyday resistance.

Over the course of its regional history, highland Southeast Asia's became what Scott terms a zone of “absorption and resistance” for communities that sought to escape the undesirable elements of state making and state space by the regions valley kingdoms (Scott, 2010). Precolonial displacement and migration was a common reaction to “taxation”, “forced labor”, “war”, “rebellion”, “raiding”, “slaving” in that era of Southeast Asian history (Aung citing Scott, 2010). While highland communities could rely on the ruggedness of highland terrain for many centuries to hinder the projection of power by valley-based state-making projects, otherwise known as “friction of terrain”, terrain is no longer the key limiting factor to state expansion and enclosure though as a factor it still remains relevant . Yet there are several parallels between migration flow of people and communities moving across the Thai-Burmese border in Mae Sot today and the historical movement of peasants away from state cores. Aung suggests that the geopolitical demarcation that is the Thai-Burma border has come to be used by migrants and refugees from Burma to evade state violence and other coercive actions of the Burmese regime. In other words where “friction of terrain” once enabled peasant migrant communities to find refuge from valley-based states, “friction of cartography” today enables Burmese migrants to find refuge from the Burmese state on the Thai side of the border. Furthermore the tactical decision by mobile communities both in present day and in the past share many of the push factors identified by Scott as the cause the movement, in particular that of violent conflict.

However “friction of cartography” as a framework is not sufficient to explain the day to day actions Burmese migrants take to evade and contain the reach of the Thai state in Mae Sot. This is because “friction of cartography” and “friction of terrain” as strategies are fundamentally based on the notion that the challenges posed by coercive state actions are solved by putting distance between the community and the state by *moving away* from it. What to migrants do when moving away is not an option? When asked, the large majority of those interviewed said they did not want to go back to Burma. The primary reason being that it was difficult for them to support themselves and their family there. Some also expressed that Burmese state violence by police or soldiers was more severe than in Thailand. Thus the coercive actions of the Thai state are seen by many migrants as more preferable to that of the Burmese state due to a higher ability to provide for their families while also experiencing less state violence. A strategic calculation in itself. Ultimately by making a conscious decision to move to Thailand, leaving their destination then becomes a less viable solution even when faced with the pressures of living with a border partial citizenship. Though living in Thailand has its difficulties, the benefits compared to their previous situation in Burma and a lack of better options in terms of income, distance from homeland and degree of state repression are some of the reasons they choose to remain. Nevertheless under border

partial citizenship migrants face a modern day evolution of the historical push factors that drove people to utilize “friction of cartography” and “friction of terrain”. Rather than forced labor there is an exploited workforce, instead of taxes there are bribes and fees deducted by employers, brokers and police, rather than direct violence there is a constant threat of arrest and deportation. Seeking to avoid these challenges while staying in Thai state to reap the benefits of their relatively improved situation, migrants resort to everyday resistance to achieve this.

Scott perceived the migrant strategies he researched as a form of resistance. During his fieldwork in Malaysia Scott delves into the everyday means by which peasants resist their economic social marginalization while insisting on "minimal cultural decencies of citizenship" (Scott, 1985:p.xvii) and not resorting to open resistance, in contrast to his preceding work on peasant rebellions in Burma and Vietnam. Faced with the advances of "a more implacable state and a larger market nexus" Scott describes the reactions of the Malaysian peasants as "polyanlian reflexes of self-protection" (Scott, 2005). In other words while they faced overt mechanisms of repression, the prioritization of making a living meant that the peasants strategically decided that resistance had to be covert rather than open. Like them Burmese migrants in Mae Sot tend not to resort to open resistance unless pushed beyond the limit of what they find acceptable in terms of being able to provide for themselves. For many migrants in Mae Sot the need to make a living that could support their family was the deciding factor in their decision to migrate. For this reason migrant everyday resistance to mechanisms of repression in Mae Sot tend to be covert as well. Noting that Scotts concept of everyday resistance has grown within partly overlapping fields Vinthagen and Johansson propose a clarification of the concept:

“(1) Everyday resistance is a practice (neither a certain consciousness, intent, recognition, nor an outcome); (2) It is historically entangled with (everyday) power (not separated, dichotomous or independent); (3) Everyday resistance needs to be understood as intersectional as the powers it engages (not engaging with one single power relation); and (4) It is heterogenic and contingent due to changing contexts and situations (not a universal strategy or unitary action form). Thus, the heterogenic and contingent practice of everyday resistance is, due to its entanglement with and intersectional relations to power, discursively articulated by actors, targets and observers; sometimes as “resistance” and sometimes not” (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013:p.1) .

This clarification of the concept will prove a useful lens to examine the field data I gathered from my focus group discussions and personal interviews. Overlapping this clarification to the case of Burmese

migrants in Mae Sot allows me to clarify and specify: (1) Everyday resistance among Burmese migrants is an act that is practiced rather than an intent or an outcome. Securing a higher salary after striking would not be considered everyday resistance as it is an outcome and not an action practiced in their everyday lives. Using forged identity cards to navigate police checkpoints is an action informed by everyday politics and therefore is everyday resistance. (2) Everyday resistance is historically entangled with (everyday) power relations in Mae Sot between migrants, employers and local and state authorities. All parties are dependent on each other for profit. The Thai state depends on migrant workers as a source of labour in sectors important to the economy such as agriculture, fishing, manufacturing and more. Employers are dependent on cheap migrant labour to work jobs that Thais generally do not desire. Migrants are dependent on their employers for their livelihoods and the Thai state for their documentation status. (3) Everyday resistance is an intersection of these multiple power relations. In the case of Mae Sot it is an intersection between migrants, their employers, and local authorities. (4) Everyday resistance in Mae Sot is heterogenic and not a universal strategy. It has numerous expressions and changes depending on context. Furthermore it is a game of cat and mouse that forces all parties to evolve their strategies over time. Mae Sot police officers today speak more Burmese than their predecessors. During a discussion with Thai anthropologist Samak Kosem in Mae Sot he revealed to me that migrants have used the language barrier as a strategy by being silent and feigning to not understand what the police are saying. As a response, while not fluently nor uniformly, some police officers have learned enough burmese to offset this strategy.

A. Documentation

Burmese migrant workers living in Mae Sot face various challenges related to documentation and access to documentation. These challenges include, but are not limited to, increased chance of police extortion, limitation in mobility, legal documents being withheld by employers. Given these challenges, comments offered by migrants tend to focus on the importance of possessing forms of documentation, particularly when interacting with the police. The work permit comes up often in migrants comments. Generally migrant workers desire having a Work Permit as it provides a level of stability and security from state intimidation. Referencing the positive aspects of having one, one migrant said:

"If we have a work permit we will work more peacefully, we don't need to worry we will just be happy" (FGD1).

Legally the possession of this permit allows them access to health rights as Thai nationals. However the cost of acquiring a Work Permit on their own is high and often beyond their financial capacity. The migrant workers whom I found to hold work permits usually worked in a factory and had it paid for by their employer. Half or all of the cost was then deducted from their monthly salaries. Those who worked in other sectors such as farming, domestic work or construction due to their temporary nature and inconsistent income were either less capable of shouldering the financial burden themselves or had employers were either unwilling or unable to paying the registration costs.

The registration scheme and the requirement of a Work Permit are in theory the only manner in which the state accepts the legality of a migrant worker who wishes to live and work legally in Mae Sot. Other comments referenced other documentations aside from work permits being used in a similar manner:

"Some people live with state permit and work permit, some people live with visa. Some people don't have any document but they still don't have to worry about the police because the employer takes responsibility for their security." (ID3)

This comment highlights the flexibility of migrants perception on the importance of documentation. Possession of all legally required documents such as a work permit and stay permit is seen more as a convenience than a vital requirement. This is because work permits and other legal documents are primarily valued for allowing one to avoid being arrested, extorted and/or deported. So long as this function is possible the nature and legality of the document is secondary. In practice there exist other forms of identity cards of a quasi legal nature which are recognized by local authorities. The question of migrant strategies in regards to documentation therefore can be posed in the following manner: given the importance of documentation in avoiding arrest or extortion what are migrant workers strategies to acquire one?

One construction worker who had experienced frequent arrests said:

"I was arrested 3 times. So I made this card, and I had to pay 300 baht (8.69 euro) per month for this stay permit. This is not really a legal status. (with) This card the police don't arrest me after I got this card. I can go to Mae Sot with this card. About my wife. This card does not apply for her. Because she is selling thing in market. So in order to sell things safely she needs a different kind of card. So she needs to get

from police. That police name is [...] he got that get that card for my wife. It is 300 baht (8.69 euro) per month also.” (ID8)

A former factory worker who left her work but desired to stay in Mae Sot

“I hired an employer (as a broker) to recommend me and to extend my work permit and visa”. (ID2)

The combination of these comments reveal several migrant strategies related to challenges in accessing documentation. First, if their employers cannot or will not shoulder the costs of their work permits, migrants use alternative routes to acquire them primarily through brokers, thereby evading associated threats by having all required legal documents. Secondly, given the importance of documentation in their day to day lives, migrants either forge legal documents or obtain ones accepted as quasi legal documents that are issued by various non-governmental, ethnic and political organizations, or in the context of governmentality, non-Thai regimes for their subjects. These organizations range from migrants schools, clinics, ethnic militias such as the KNU or research centers like the Shoklo Malaria Research Unit. From the last two comments above the police and employers are also hired as brokers to provide these documents. Holders of these cards which are recognized by Thai authorities are less likely to be arrested and deported but are still not immune to it. The acceptance of these cards is not fixed and is subject to change. As such the goal for migrant workers strategy vis a vis state avoidance is partially met.

The card system that requires non-Thai citizens to carry either a citizenship card or a registered illegal immigrant worker card is a tool employed by local and state authorities to control the borderland populace and their mobility. Placing numerous checkpoints along the the highway is crucial to their control over the movement of migrant workers (Pongsawat, 2007). Thus for Burmese migrant workers, proving their identity and legal status by showing their documentation is a daily affair fraught with risk. To avoid the challenges associated with not having any legal documentation migrants use various quasi legal identity cards which enable to them to possess a certain kind of legality due to their partial recognition by local authorities (Lee, 2007; Aung, 2014; Reddy, 2015). Carrying some form of ID, even an unofficial one, is part of migrants strategy for the evasion of the threat posed by police at checkpoints (Aung, 2014). The legitimacy of the card depends on the location where it is being used. For example a UN card cannot be used when far from the camp or a student card when not in the vicinity of a migrant school (Kosem, 2012). Quasi legal documents that have successfully been used by Burmese migrants include “work permits, passports, day passes, doctors’ notes from medical clinics in Thailand, factory identity cards, receipts that attest to a person’s enrolment in a Thai registration scheme, 10-year residency cards, UN-issued identity cards, letters from Thai bureaucrats, and cards issued by nonprofit organizations

that work along the border” (Reddy, 2015:p.252) among others. Thus the Work Permit and temporary Border Pass are not the only legal documents accepted by local state agencies. These quasi passports are issued by “regimes” of ethnic and political organizations for their “subjects”. Possession of these cards decreases the chances of arrest and deportation. Samak Kosem observed that in the case of muslim migrants travelling in a group for a religious purpose they can use their identity cards to get through the checkpoint because the authorities manning the checkpoints are already aware of the religious event. In terms of muslim movement in Mae Sot he found that cards are issued by the Muslim Islamic Center for Dawa (MICD) as they actively have to travel around the border, in the camps, in the muslim communities. The police allow this movement and the card because they are aware of this network and receive a report from the MICD about their activities (Kosem, 2012). While observing daily instances in which Burmese people in Mae Sot had to present identity papers, whether at checkpoints, in court or in a legal aid office Reddy noted that inconsistencies and mistakes in the documents presented was not automatic grounds for the refusal of their legitimacy (Reddy, 2015). Due to their quasi legal nature possession of these cards does not completely prevent arrest by police. In these situations the organizations that issued the card will contact the police directly and arrange for the release of the card holder, usually after paying bribes (Lee, 2007). A possible explanation for the range of quasi legal identity documentation instruments is the persistence of inconsistency in policies regarding the regulation of migration. Rather than having a single government ministry or agency responsible for the design and enforcement of immigration policies, it is the Prime Minister, their Cabinet and the Ministry of Labor that issues policy decrees which then to “flip-flop in step with the vicissitudes of economic growth or decline, political in/stability, and voting trends” (Reddy, 2015:p.254). The ultimate solution to the constant threat of confrontation with state forces due to their lack of documentation is for migrant workers to gain complete legal recognition from the Thai state through the acquisition of citizenship. This strategy is primarily employed by the Burmese Karen who make use of their ethnic connections with their Thai Karen relatives that live along the border. By becoming legally adopted by their Thai relatives they are able to apply for citizenship cards (Lee, 2011). The identity card is therefore a tool that is used by both the state and migrants on one another in a paradoxical manner. It is used by the state to control the border population and its movements and by the migrants to avoid the state and facilitate their movements. Whether it is the state or migrants using identity cards as a tool, it has limits in its efficiency. For migrants the legitimacy of the card depends on where it is being used and who issued it. Though the Thai state’s intention is to use documentation as a means of control, inconsistencies in migration policies led to an informal state acceptance of multiple forms of identification, which migrants exploit to their advantage.

The relationship between migrants and documentation is related to their legal position because the documentation status of migrant workers determines the legality of their presence abroad. Thus their legal position in Thailand is determined by whether the Thai state classifies a Burmese migrant worker as having full documentation, temporary documentation, or no documentation. Looking through the lens of border partial citizenship this classification vis-a-vis the Thai state correlates to the partiality of their citizenship/legal position. By definition border partial citizens are not the equals of “full” citizens or workers in regards to entitlements, protection, and labor rights. This partiality remains true regardless of variation in documentation status. The registered illegal worker regime is one form of border partial citizenship that is based on the possession of a work permit. This document designates, as the name of the regime indicates, the individual carrying it as an registered illegal worker and confines its holder to the employer who sponsored the permit. Pongsawat argues that this regime is “a certain form of social relation as production [that] was invented to ensure the maximum profit via exploitation by the prevention of citizenship rights.” (Pongsawat, 2007:p.432). In other words the legal position of a migrant worker, as determined by their documentation status, is produced by the state with financial profit as their motivation. Thus from the perspective of border partial citizenship the regimes of documentation are tools that allow the Thai government to control migrant workers, maintain a surveillance apparatus on the border as well as produce a cheap and flexible workforce. Through Foucault's lens on the power relationship between a government and its subjects, the documentation and registration processes that determine a migrants legal status, in the context of border partial citizenship, are manifestations of the Thai state's governmentality. In turn the governmentality of border partial citizenship produces a legal position for migrants that denies them the rights of citizens with full citizenship and “designs” them as marginalized, exploitable and above all a source of labor.

Administrative control by the Thai state along the border is not exercised in a consistent or conventional manner as alternative forms of governance are also practiced there. Non-thai border communities display state-like functions in terms of their own governance. In combination with instances of local Thai authorities strategically choosing not to apply laws and regulations issued by the central government, these dynamics have led some to argue the existence of a hybrid regime (Lee, 2007). As my fieldwork has shown, when documentation cannot be obtained through legal channels migrants will pursue alternative options. These alternative options which produce identification documents that would be considered invalid elsewhere in Thailand, such as a doctors note, are generally accepted by local authorities in the borderland. The quasi acceptance of legally invalid cards as acceptable forms of

documentation is made possible by the governmentality of the Thai state existing alongside other non-Thai actors govern of migrants in Mae Sot i.e migrant communities, NGO's and CBO's (ibid). In other words police sometimes intentionally alternate between applying and not applying the law regarding documentation. When policemen choose to let migrants with illegal documents through checkpoints or when a soldier chooses to ignore a young woman without an identity card their choices are not only informed by the paradigm of legality or illegality but also their own temperament. In regards to documentation, this leaves migrants with room for negotiation when interactions with local authorities that can be used to their advantage. Therefore, from the perspective of migrant strategies, documentation is a tool that allows the migrant to negotiate their legal position with the government. Furthermore it is a tool that can be gained illegally or acquired from sources other than the Thai government, thus their legal position is not solely determined by the Thai state but by themselves and other regimes as well. By generally recognizing these alternative forms of documentation as valid, the legitimacy of the regimes that issued these documents is tacitly accepted. Through the lens of migrant strategies, the Thai state's governmentality in practice produces individuals that are able to exploit its loopholes regarding documentation to their benefit as well as determine their own legal position to an extent.

The documentation status of migrant workers is in part determined by their spatial position because they are subject to the laws and regulations of the country they reside in. In the case of migrants working in Mae Sot they are not only affected by the dynamics of living in Thailand but the particular dynamics of living in the Thai-Burma borderlands as well. On one hand the Thai side of the border is considered to be sovereign territory under the Thai government's control. On the other hand the presence of a significant alien population has resulted in governance being shared with other entities that are not the Thai state (Lee, 2008). The dynamics of documentation in the borderlands exemplifies the sharing and negotiation of governance.

Work permits that migrant workers possess do not allow them to travel further than the area they are registered to without written permission from the employer and the local authorities. Furthermore the migrant workers that do not possess work permits spatially confine themselves to their homes and communities and are legally confined to the area they are registered to. Even those with work permits also tend to confine themselves to their communities though they could move freely within Mae Sot if they wished. I believe this is due to a combination of factors: an insufficient knowledge of the the Thai language, a lack of social interaction with local Thais outside of the workplace, long work hours making them prioritize their free time with those close to them as well as a lingering distrust of the police. The restrictions on the mobility of migrants is a result of the regimes of border partial citizenship which

regulate their movement through documentation. Border partial citizenship is part of Thai borderland dynamics because it is the legal and political mechanism that shapes the lives of migrants in the borderlands. The spatial restrictions that migrants impose on themselves is also a result of the dynamics living in the border society of Mae Sot whether or not they have documentation.

Documentation does not completely determine the spatial position of migrant workers however, because the movement of migrants can also be self-determined even without possession of the required legal documents. Indeed many of the migrant workers who travelled to Mae Sot from Burma did so without using legal channels. And as mentioned above the decision of migrants without work permits to limit their spatial movements is a choice. Unauthorized movement of Burmese labourers within Thailand is also prevalent with the primary destination of choice being Bangkok due to the higher wages offered there (Lee, 2011). The migrants who decide to do so employ various methods to avoid police checkpoints: “some migrants attempt to climb the rugged mountain rather than to travel by car so as to evade the checkpoints. [...] Some of them even walked from Mae Sot all the way to Bangkok.”(Lee, 2011:p.88). However most employ brokers to guarantee safe passage to the capital. The strategies of migrants in regards to documentation enable them to navigate checkpoints and interaction with police the borderlands and Mae Sot. This is due to the acceptance of quasi-legal documents by local authorities as valid documentation which in turn implies an acceptance of the regimes that issued these documents and their legitimacy. A migrants can use the particularities of their spatial position to their advantage with regards to documentation.

I define the economic position of Burmese migrant workers in terms of their income, education and occupation. The combination of those indicators can influence the type of documentation they will or will not possess as well as their desire to cross the border illegally. For example my field data shows the primary reason given by migrants for illegally immigrating to Thailand was because their income in Burma was not sufficient to provide for their needs. Their occupation, which is a combination of income and educational attainment, provided them with incomes too low to meet their necessary expenses. Consequently the improvement of their financial situation became a higher priority than immigrating to Thailand through legal channels. The proportion of illegal migrant workers predominantly being employed in low skilled jobs in comparison to high skilled jobs reflects the influence those indicators have on the legality of a immigrants presence in Thailand. Immigrants with high economic status or in other words those with high educational attainment, income and occupational prestige such as doctors, engineers and diplomats for example, are less likely to enter Thailand illegally because doing so is not necessary to their immediate survival in comparison to the individuals who have low educational

attainment, income and occupational prestige such as farmers, construction workers and factory workers. To an extent the inverse can also be argued: the documentation a migrant worker has can influence their levels of income and the type of occupations they will have in Thailand. Whether a low skilled migrant worker has a work permit or not it is highly likely that they will be paid less than the legal minimum wage. Nevertheless fully documented migrants are more likely to earn enough income from their employment to cover their necessary expenses in comparison to temporary and undocumented migrants (IOM, 2015:33). Additionally fully documented migrants are more likely to work in manufacturing, industrial production and sales while undocumented migrants were generally employed in agricultural and other physically demanding jobs. (IOM, 2015:30). Thus the education, income and occupation of a migrant determines their documentation and to a certain extent vice-versa.

Applying the above to the context of Mae Sot shows that globalization as the transnational flow of people, goods and policies is what produces the capability of the Thai state to exert its sovereignty over Burmese migrant workers through border partial citizenship. The manner in which the Thai state exerts its sovereignty over migrant workers in turn influences the economic position of said migrant workers. The creation of rules by the Thai state that govern the rights of burmese migrant workers, for example the rules that forbid migrant workers from working in certain sectors, limits their economic opportunities thus impacting their economic position. Another example on how the exertion of sovereignty can influence the economic position of Burmese migrants can be found in the system the Thai state uses to identify citizens and non-citizens. A migrants legal status by which they will be identified is issued by the state. The difference in economic position between documented and undocumented is small but not negligible. Documented workers tend to work in sectors that employ them all year long meaning they are more likely to earn more over the course of a year than undocumented workers thus affecting their economic position.

The economic position of migrants is also in part determined by themselves. In order to secure an improved economic position a migrant worker must use all the tools they have at their disposal. A work permit or other forms of accepted documentation are such tools as they enable the migrant to avoid arrest which protects them from the costs of being arrested, whether the cost is the payment of bail, a bribe or salary deductions. My field work has shown that migrant workers in Mae Sot make use of brokers, forgeries and their informal network to acquire these tools. As the majority of migrants in Mae Sot do not have documentation, strategies are also developed for this particular situation. Chalfin's perspective on how the encounters between state actors and state subjects a multitude of agendas collide: personal, national, supranational is of particular relevance here. Though the state actor represents a larger entity it is

nevertheless an interaction between two human beings. The desires, temptations and narratives of these individuals also come time play (Chalfin, 2008). In the context of Mae Sot, the interactions between the Burmese worker who migrated to seek a better economic position or security and the policeman who represents an apparatus designed to control this movement is such an encounter of contrasting agendas. The human side of this encounter is what leads policemen having a variety of responses for the same situation. Migrants without documents could be asked for money in exchange for release or left to go on their way. Migrants with legally invalid documentation can be left alone or also become a target for extortion. In order for these encounters to result in a positive outcome for the Burmese worker, migrant strategies are developed and employed for situations with or without documentation some of which appeal to the Thai state actors compassionate side.

The social position or status of an individual may influence their perceived documentation status in Thailand to a degree. The distinction made between two subcategories of immigrants known as “expats” and “migrant workers” is an example of this. During a conversation with doctors from the Shoklo Malaria Research Unit over a barbeque I was having a discussion with a Burmese doctor who told me that he considered himself an expat in Thailand. It then struck me that while a Burmese doctor and Burmese factory worker may both have work permits and are both technically migrants who are employed outside of their home country the doctor was called an expat while the factory workers was called a migrant worker. And along with these different terms came different assumptions about an individual's legal status and documentation. The varying assignment of the two terms to different groups of foreigners alludes to their perceived position in Thai society.

To understand how social status in Thailand is determined one must first understand that Thai society is “a hierarchical society with flexibility. Each person occupies a certain position in the hierarchy according to age, sex, wealth, power and education.” (Kuwinpant, 2002:p.6). While I agree with this description as it reflects what I was taught growing up in Thailand, my experience has shown me that “race” and “nationality” also played a similar role in determining one's position, particularly when it came to assigning the term “migrant” or “expat”. Being both Karen and French I was aware of how, within this framework, people of Burmese, Cambodian and Lao origin occupied a lower position in comparison to French people and other Westerners. Burmese, Cambodians and Laotians, who are traditionally referred to as migrant workers or immigrants are commonly associated with being undocumented while the legality of Westerners is largely unquestioned and are traditionally referred to as expats. I experienced this discrepancy in treatment myself while travelling on a bus from Mae Sot to Chiang Mai. At a

checkpoint the bus stopped and a military officer came on board and asked, in Thai, that everyone show their identification. Everyone on board, Burmese and Thai, took out their passports and ID cards while I did not, pretending to not to be fluent in Thai in order to see how the soldier would react. The soldier walked row by row and checked each card. When they saw a burmese passport or ID card they would ask questions about where they are from, where they are going and why. Upon arriving at my seat the soldier and I made eye contact, he simply nodded and walked on, something that he did not do even for Thai nationals. On the following bus trip I repeated the experiment but this time pretending to be reaching for my passport after having made eye contact. The soldier put his hand up indicating I didn't have to show it and proceeded to continue checking the documentents of the Thai and Burmese passengers. It was on the third attempt at this experiment that I was asked to show my papers, though I was not asked anything regarding myself or my travels. While I did not ask the officers why they didn't ask for my identification I believe that it is because they made an assumption on my documentation status based on my caucasian appearance.

My experiment indicated to me that “race” and external appearances are a factor in the discrepancy in treatment of individuals at checkpoints. In this experiment I was treated not only differently from the Burmese but the Thai passengers as well as they were asked for ID and I was not. One possible explanation is that in the context of checkpoints in the Thai-Burma borderlands Thai authorities prioritize finding illegal migrant workers resulting in them paying less attention to foreigners that do not fit that profile. Outside of the context of checkpoints many migrants in Mae Sot are stopped and asked for their papers in the streets. While I have no concrete data from literature or fieldwork as to why the Thai police chose to stop them I do believe their external appearance plays a role. There are limitations to how much can be extrapolated from my experience at the checkpoints in regards to social position and documentation in Thailand. In major cities such as Bangkok and Chiang Mai all foreigners are more likely to be asked for identification at checkpoints. During surprise checks by immigration at NGO's in Mae Sot the visas of all foreign workers are examined. Furthermore since the military coup of 2014 Thai authorities have more consistently enforced visa laws and have increasingly cracked down on all foreigners staying in Thailand illegally. Therefore the extent to which “race” and appearance are factors in social inequality in regards to an individuals documentation status also has its limits. While taking these limitations into account is this experience is somewhat indicative that migrant workers occupy the lowest rung in the social hierarchy of Thailand. Police asking only migrants where they were going and why at the very least indicates that the social position they occupy is a different one from Thais and other foreigners. Furthermore, they are among the poorest, the ones with the least rights accorded, the

least rights respected, finally their portrayal in Thai media and perception in Thai society is frequently negative. From this it can be concluded that the majority of Burmese migrants in Mae Sot are marginalized individuals.

Following the ILO definition of marginalization in Thailand as “a process through which citizenship rights on which livelihood and living standards depend are not recognized and respected. This involves relationships between people, in which rights are challenged and defended through negotiations and conflict” (Kadun, 2014:p.81) the system of documentation under the in the context of border partial citizenship is the very process that denies migrants their rights producing marginalized individuals. This is done by registering migrant workers under the minority immigrant regime and the registered illegal migrant worker regime both of which renders the registered individual as a person with partial rights. The marginalizing effects of their partial citizenship reaches their social, economic, spatial and legal positions. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, Pongsawat argues that the production of marginalized individuals by the regime of border partial citizen is intentionally done to create a source of cheap labor and take advantage of the flow of migrants and capital in the region. He describes border partial citizenship as a negotiation between economic actors, state actors and illegal immigrant workers, in line with the ILO’s definition of marginalization in Thailand. The migrants interviewed during my fieldwork In summary border partial citizenship uses documentation as a top-down structural force that results in their social position being a marginalized one.

B. Police

To protect against arrest and extortion by police migrants, at checkpoints or otherwise, migrants rely on several strategies of which the central component is evasion. One strategy draws on local networks to act as an informal early warning system. These networks primarily consist of friends, family, community members, and sometimes employers. When migrants do encounter police who seek to extort money from them, giving them what money they have on their person is a strategy in itself as the amount demanded once arrested increases from around 100 baht (2.90 euro) to 1000 baht (29 euro). Though some migrants can rely on an employer to pay for their release the money is often deducted from their salary therefore having some money at hand is a means to avoid this outcome.

“We would run and hide. If we cannot run then we would be captured. If we are captured the boss will get us out. If we don’t work in factory we would contact family.” (FGD2)

“We would run. But we would know ahead if there is trouble. Another community would tell us. If we are caught we would go to the police station. And if we have money we will pay.” (FGD4)

“We can listen to the radio, we will hear the news then we will talk to each other. Some people who have their friend in Myawaddy they will go temporarily and some people they will accept it and go to the rice field.” (FGD5)

Others discussed relying on their employer to free them if jailed. Another migrant said that being confident when talking to the police and knowing how to act in this situation is an important skill to know if they do not have an employer to pay their bail. All of these strategies also depend on the policemen that come to make the arrests. Migrants know that policemen from Mae Sot are more likely to take bribes and can be negotiated with while the immigration police from Bangkok is not as flexible, making it less possible for their employer to solve the situation. A recurring example given by migrants when discussing evasion of police was being informed of an incoming police raid by their employers and told to hide in rice fields or the jungle for a few days. Some also mentioned crossing the border to Myawaddy and hiding there until they are told it is safe to return. The previous two strategies are examples of friction of terrain and friction of cartography employed by the respondents of the focus groups and interviews. Another strategy particularly common among those without documentation was to stay indoors as much as possible and limit their movements. By staying within their homes migrants take advantage of having learned that local authorities are generally unwilling to raid a private residence due to the length of time required to acquire a warrant. In essence this is a localized version of friction of cartography that does not involve an international border but nevertheless a legal one as it makes use of the law to put distance between the migrant and the state.

“Sometimes we had to hide in the jungle for 10-15 days and the factory would look for us and give us food (friction of terrain). Sometimes we had to run up to Myawaddy to hide from the police (friction of cartography)”. (ID2)

“I would stay at home and hide. Normally we would call the boss’ wife” (ID9)

The persistency of migrants attempts to live in Mae Sot and the frequency of attempts by the police to arrest and deport them has essentially created a city-wide game of "cat and mouse" in which migrants have various tactics to avoid the state and police adapt to these tactics prompting new ones. As mentioned, when some are aware of where the police have set up checkpoints they will inform others, an

example of a strategic use of their social network being used to protect themselves and one another. In response to migrants taking advantage of their stationary position the police now roam the city in motorbikes stopping people they think look like illegal migrants. One of my Burmese informants does not ride a motorbike with a friend who is undocumented as an encounter with the police would result in both being extorted. When he encountered police outside of his migrant school, he would present his school ID and act like he was on his way back. Faced with a police stop, migrants who do not have documentation are not always arrested and put into detention centers. Police will usually ask for money in exchange for their release. The amount given varies depending on how much they have in their possession at that moment. An informant told me that it is possible to negotiate the price of the bribe with the police. If he does not have enough money at the time the police either write down their name and address and collect the bribe every month or take them to the station where their family or employer will pay a higher fee. Amidst the numerous strategies elaborated by migrants over time to mitigate the threats posed by local authorities, evasion remains the predominant strategy.

Research specifically targeting the everyday strategies migrant employ to cope with challenges posed by the local police is relatively sparse. Aung's paper on migrants self protection strategies in relation to personal security, health, food, and livelihoods in Mae Sot provides other strategies described to him during his fieldwork. When traveling in town on motorbike some migrants would bring someone who speaks Thai in case they encountered police at a checkpoint or otherwise. Others folded their bills, quickly presented them to the police in order to give the appearance of giving a larger sum of money, and walk away taking advantage of the need for discretion on the part of the policeman who often take money quickly to avoid being seen accepting money. Another strategy when travelling is a necessity is using detours through rice farms and sugarcane fields for example where they know police do not place checkpoints. In relation to the informal networks which migrants rely on his fieldwork found that "when they choose to flee, they coordinate with family, friends, and co-workers in the area to determine strategic hiding places. They also coordinate with community organizations and non-governmental actors to secure emergency relief, including food, shelter, medicine, and communication with people who can instruct when they should leave their site (Aung, 2012:p.95) .

Aungs fieldwork also yielded similar if not identical strategies told to me such as limiting one's movements, not leaving their homes and place of work, hiding in rice fields during mass arrests, and the reliance on an informal network particularly when fleeing. "Migrants report that when they do choose to flee, they coordinate with family, friends, and co-workers in the area to determine strategic hiding places.

They also coordinate with community organizations and non-governmental actors to secure emergency relief, including food, shelter, medicine, and communication with people who can instruct when they should leave their site” (Aung, 2012:p.95)

When considering the moral issue of corruption from the point of view of foreign workers a comparative approach is necessary. Even beyond the context of my fieldwork there have been several instances in which a migrant told me that for all their flaws Thai police are more humane than their Burmese counterparts. While Thai police will extort some money Burmese police could potentially hurt or kill them. In an interview with Lee a political activist told him "If there is no corruption and bribery, only with transparent and legal enforcement, we cannot stay here. We would be deported to Burma with subsequently more harsh sufferings from the Burmese authorities" (Lee, 2008:p.110). While corruption and extortion should not be justified it is also important to examine the issue from the person being extorted. In this context, corruption is also a tool which migrants use to continue their lives in Mae Sot and avoid the difficulties they left Burma for.

Evasion is a key part of migrant strategies and is expressed in various ways, from literal evasion by hiding to paying bribes on the spot and knowing how to talk to policemen. Reliance on informal networks is another major component of their strategies as it can act as an early warning system, a means of acquiring documentation that would allow them to walk away from police inspections among, a support system to hide and more. Part of these strategies employed by migrants are made possible by the existence of corruption and bribery. Should all laws be enforced much of the conditions that make some migrant strategies a viable solution would no longer exist.

Under the border partial citizen regime of registered illegal immigrant worker a Burmese worker has the dual status of temporary registered labourer and illegal migrant. This gives local police officers considerable discretionary power in determining the legal position of a migrant worker because the status of the former does not overrule that of the latter. In other words a registered worker can be arrested for being an illegal immigrant if they are outside of their workplace. This is due to the legal position of an illegal migrant in Thailand being that they are “allowed to “work” in a demarcated space, not to “live”, “move”, or “be employed” freely” (Pongsawat, 2007).

While local police may have the power to determine the legal status of a migrant worker, the recent trend of decreased police harassment for migrants with work permits indicates that this power is

not being exercised to the same degree as in the past. It is difficult to attribute a cause to this relatively new phenomenon as it has not been researched. An explanation given by Mr Tip, the secretary of the Tak Chamber of Commerce, was the recent strengthening of diplomatic and trade relations between Burma and Thailand. In 2013 Burma's minister of labour indicated that police extortion of migrant workers with legal documentation was a potential source of strain in the relations of the two countries. As a sign of diplomatic goodwill towards a major trade partner the practice of targeting legal migrant workers was curbed. This indicates that while the legal position of Burmese migrant workers may be determined by local police, this determination and the extent to which it can be applied is subject to influence by national and international dynamics.

Police are the representatives of the states sovereign power. They are the means through which the Thai state exerts its rule over its subjects in Thailand, maintains its surveillance apparatus and enforces the immigration policies of border partial citizenship and the laws of exception regarding legal and illegal immigrants. The regime of border partial citizenship is a central component in the relationship between migrants, police and governmentality as the police enforce its laws and migrants lives are shaped by its laws. The manner in which the Thai state exerts its power on migrants in Mae Sot though the police in turn shapes the strategies that migrants develop and employ. By intentionally ignoring the illegal presence of a migrant worker they are also indicators of the state sanctioning this illegal presence due to structural dependence. Due to this heavy dependence migrants are a significant part of the governing activities of the state in Mae Sot. Migrants are also the cause for the sharing of governance with non-Thai regimes described by Lee. Their presence is the reason of being for much of the CBO's and NGO's based in Mae Sot. These organizations, which generally serve the interests of migrants, act as regimes which are informally recognized by the Thai state adding to the specificity of governmentality in Mae Sot as well as the flexibility of their legal position. As such they are one of the primary expressions of governmentality in the lives of migrant workers in Mae Sot.

The existing relationship between migrants and the police is shaped by their spatial position and in turn shapes mobility of migrant workers. Under the regime of border partial citizenship existing laws restrict the mobility of migrant workers to specified spatial areas such as workplaces, homes or provinces. These laws are enforced by local authorities, particularly the police. For example Burmese migrant teachers and students with ID cards are permitted to stay near the border but forbidden to travel away from the border further than the nearest police checkpoint (Reddy, 2015). As a reaction to the threat of arrest and extortion by police, migrants employ various spatial tactics to evade the police. Unregistered illegal immigrant workers stay in their homes and workplace to avoid arrest. Migrants determined to leave

Mae Sot to find better paying jobs in other parts of Thailand base their movements on police checkpoints. Thus police influence the spatial position of migrants by enforcing laws that restrict the mobility of migrants while migrants manage the influence of their spatial position by developing spatial strategies to circumvent and evade Thai police.

The conflictual nature of the migrant/police relationship could possibly be linked to conflicting perspectives on the nature of the borderlands. It is possible that migrants tend to perceive the borderlands in a culturalist manner in contrast to the police who, as representatives of the state and by the nature of their work, would be more inclined to view it from a statist perspective. Taking Ferguson and Gupta's perspective on border as interconnected social spaces in which people's lives are rooted many Burmese migrants in Mae Sot have ties to both sides of the border whether familial, historical or otherwise. Some view the Thai side of the borderlands as a destination for a better life, some also view the border as a tool to protect themselves from the reach of the state. This perspective would naturally conflict with that of the police as their role in theory is to enforce the sovereign law of Thailand as it is part of Thailand's sovereign territory. Consequently while migrants would view their presence in the borderlands as necessary the police would view it as illegal resulting in conflict due to their spatial position.

The spatial position of the police in the borderlands also influences their actions towards migrants which consequently influences their relationship with them. Being on the periphery of the nation-state local the actionctions of local authorities are sometimes not in line with that of the central government. A simple example being that local police in Mae Sot are more likely to accept a bribe and let a migrant worker go than immigration officers from Bangkok. In my discussions with Samak Kosem he revealed to me that in his fieldwork he found that there is competition among policemen to be placed in border towns. This is because the significant presence of migrants in border towns provides substantial opportunities for policemen to profit financially through extortion. While I do not have literature to back up this claim should it be true it would fit my observation that the presence of migrants by the police has been monetized by the police which is made possible by the particular dynamics of their spatial position in the borderlands.

The manner in which police behave towards migrants in Thailand is affected by the position of migrants in Thai society. This position is influenced by the discourse of government officials and Thai mainstream media. These discourses turn migrants into the "other" and shapes public opinion of them. Social attitudes in Thailand towards illegal Burmese migrants play an important role in sustaining the practices of the border partial citizen regime. A 2012 survey found that Thai people generally have a

negative attitude towards refugees and migrants from Burma. The results of the survey indicated that the Thai population perceived refugees and migrant workers as a threat to public safety who encroach on the job opportunities for native Thais. Thais who lived closer to refugee camps and in rural areas near the border had more positive views in comparison to those in urban areas (Sunpuwan, 2012).

Attitudes towards migrant workers from Burma are based on a long standing national tradition of antagonism and deeply embedded historical perceptions of them as an evil and aggressive neighbor. Since the formation of the modern Thai state anti-Burmese attitudes have been fostered through a nationalistic historical imagination that was transmitted through the educational curriculum (Pongsawat, 2007). historical texts propagate an image of the Burmese as the historical enemy of Thai people to successive generations of Thai students at every level of education. An outcome of this discourse has been the justification of poor working and living conditions for low-skilled migrant workers from Burma in addition to prohibitive and racialized laws (Arnold and Pickles, 2011). Racializing Burmese people by representing them as having a singular national identity with negative social and personal traits has led to the negative public opinion Thai society hold of migrants and refugees from Burma. This social stigma informs the perceived social position migrants occupy in Thai society. Through this discourse a climate of indifference towards the plight of migrants emerged which permitted the unlawful practices engaged by employers and police officers under the regime of border partial citizenship. Once again drawing on the ILO's definition of marginalization in Thailand policemen are a crucial component of the "process through which citizenship rights on which livelihood and living standards depend are not recognized and respected" the police are a example of top-down structural marginalizing force. They use the of legal status of migrants as border partial citizens to limit their mobility, extort them for money and arbitrarily decide the validity of their identification documents. Furthermore by ignoring the violation of rights regarding livelihood and living conditions they contribute to the marginalization of migrant workers by others.

Under the regime of border partial citizenship access to the three indicators of socioeconomic status, income, occupation and education are limited for migrants by law for the purpose of maintaining a cheap, flexible and vulnerable workforce. By creating laws that racialize and regulate access to these indicators the Thai state has made it difficult for migrant workers to improve their socioeconomic status. Under Thai law Burmese migrant workers are only allowed to have occupations that are low-paid and low-skilled jobs such as farming, fishing, construction and domestic work and are prohibited from working in other sectors (Pongsawat, 2007). By limiting the type of occupation a migrant has these laws also limit the level of income a migrant may earn. Though I have not found research data on the financial

cost of systemic police extortion in Mae Sot I believe it to be a reasonable assumption that it also presents a strain on their financial resources. Furthermore laws that restrict the spatial mobility of migrants obstructs their economic freedom of earning higher wages in other parts of Thailand. Finally, by law, migrant workers are not allowed form unions which denies their right to freedom of association and leaves them vulnerable to violations of workers rights (Arnold, 2007). The socioeconomic status of migrant workers is also affected by the non-enforcement of laws that are designed to protect their rights as individuals and workers. As previously noted the salary of most Burmese migrants, whether legal or illegal, is predominantly below the legal minimum wage. This practice by employers is systemic and would not be possible without the non-enforcement of the minimum wage law by the police. By enforcing these laws designed to marginalize migrants and not enforcing those designed to protect them the police maintain the efforts of the Thai state to keep the socioeconomic status of migrants a poor, marginalized and vulnerable one.

BPC is the means through which the Thai state seeks to control and profit from the results of channel making that increased the flow of people, goods and capital between Burma and Thailand. Police, soldiers and immigration officials are the “boots on the ground” that survey and maintain the control of these flows, particularly the flow of labour migration. As such the migrants that are utilizing the results of channel making must develop strategies to traverse this flow while evading the obstacles presented by the enforcement of border partial citizenship by the state to arrive at their final destination with the goal of improving their economic position. As is the case with much of their strategies they are centered on evasion, a reliance on informal networks, and various forms of documentation. In summary globalization, when understood as flows, channel making and labour migration, relates to the migrant police relationship with migrants being the object of flow and police being the obstacle of the flow.

In the context of Pongsawats sceptical perspective on globalization in Mae Sot these channel regulating actions by the Thai police are actions are the manifestations of spatial administration by the Thai government to regulate people. The goal of the Thai government to implement a Special Economic Zone in Mae Sot has facilitated the movement of goods and capital along the Thai-Burma border. At the same time the government has publicly made efforts to clamp down in illegal migration in the area though in practice this has resulted in little concrete results (Tangseefa, 2016). Should irregular migration become much more controlled many migrants would be negatively impacted and the local police as well as they would lose people they can extort money from. Thus the more recent channel making efforts of the Thai

government as articulated in the SEZ could potentially change the dynamic of the migrant police relationship by decreasing the possibility of illegal behavior on the part of policemen.

C. Employer

The key difference between the strategies migrants develop to face challenges posed by police and employers lies in how the former and latter are perceived. The goal of migration for many is to secure a better livelihood. Employers are a means to that end while police are a hindrance. In other words unlike the police, whom migrants avoid and seek to put distance between them, employers are sought out as they are in essence the gatekeepers of that which many migrated for: a better livelihood. However when the employer mistreats them or does not provide them with enough income for subsistence, both being obstacles to a better livelihood, a shift in tactics is needed to achieve their goal. Therefore there are two divergent branches of migrant strategies in regard to employers and meeting their objective: the first being how to find one in order to secure a job the second being how to mitigate, counteract, or evade their negative actions. A limitation in this paper is that when I formulated and posed my questions to the participants I thought of the relationship of migrants and employers in oppositional terms and primarily focused on how they reacted to mistreatment or abuse by their employer. This was a mistake as the field data showed that contrary to my naive assumption that police and employers were held in the same regard, the relationship between migrants and employers was more nuanced than simply an adversarial one. I did not ask any questions about strategies relating to other aspects of their relationship and because of this I will be relying on the literature to fill in this gap.

All five focus groups reported an increase in their salaries in the past few years from approximately 50 baht (1.45 euro) to 200 baht (5.79 euro) for a days work. However some migrants have also reported that while their wages have increased over the years it has not kept up with rising goods and housing prices. The following comment shows that directly appealing to employers to raise their salaries is a strategy to cope with the rising cost of living in Mae Sot. Most likely this is the first step they would take should a problem arise with their payments as it poses the least amount of time and effort and probably the least amount of complications in comparison to relying on strikes, NGOs, the judicial system or leaving their workplace:

“ According to the employer the longer you stay the more salary you get. For us the normal rate is 300 baht a day we are supposed to receive but we don’t get that. So we get only this much. And why our salary increase is because the rent is increasing so we ask for the employer to raise our income.” (FGD5)

Fitting the characteristics of migrant strategies for other challenges, migrants also use alternative routes to access what they are denied when official channels cannot be relied on. Localized solutions, offered by private entities or by NGOs, friends, family and co-workers are also sources of assistance when challenges arise in relation to their workplace. Many spoke of their reliance on NGO’s and CBO’s to help with issues related to compensation or difficult working conditions. A discussion with a young Burmese migrant who worked at the Yaung Chi Oo Workers Association (YCOWA), an NGO concerned with workers rights and seeks to provide them with legal assistance, confirmed that the primary reason migrant seek their help is for assistance regarding compensation.

“Nowadays its ok, we have the organization, the office to help us against the employer to strike. We have more right because the people of the organization they are improving.” (FGD1)

“There is a organization to help with social security. I have experienced it before, I didn’t receive my salary so I report to the organization, the CBO” (FGD3)

“We have a radio station called Map Radio. Everyday they broadcast that if you are mistreated by employee or police you can call this number. And everybody know that.” (FGD5)

The following comment not only shows how a problem regarding compensation was solved thanks to an NGO but also that failure to provide compensation to workers is not necessarily the result of a decision made by employers. This problem sometimes arises from within the management structure without the knowledge of the owner:

“She never experienced that in the factory. But if it happen they would change. The manager said he won’t give the salary but their boss did not know. So since they have their right they report to an organization and the boss said ‘I didn’t know about this’ so they got their salary” (FGD2)

While NGO’s and CBO’s are a part of migrants support system and therefore part of their strategic arsenal for everyday resistance it seems that the predominant solution to dealing with abusive

practices of employers is an evasion-based strategy in which migrants leave and find a new workplace. After having been falsely accused to reporting her workplace to an NGO one migrant commented on how she felt quitting her job was in her best interest before the relationship with her employers further deteriorated. The comment shows that she made an evasion-based strategic decision to cut off potential adverse actions:

“If they pick on me like this it is not good for me because they can they can trick me. For example, they can pick up one shirt and cut it and then accuse me for damaging it and put me into jail for that and that’s why I resigned.” (ID2)

The young Burmese man who spoke for the YCOWA described a trend he observed in regards to migrants responses to mistreatment by employer in which fewer migrant workers are coming to them for their legal services. The main reason cited is because migrant workers don't want to take the time to settle their problems in court because they have to work and earn money. Another reason is that it is relatively easy for migrant workers to find a new job in another factory as more and more are opening. Given this opportunity few take the time to settle their grievances in court. In the perspective of the YCOWA this dynamic gives employers little incentive to respect workers rights given the lack of consequences. This observation is summed up in the following comment a migrant working in a recycling factory offered:

“If we are mistreated like that I would leave the job. For me I think there is not much difference if I contact NGO only trouble.” (FGD1)

It is important to note that the strategies migrants develop in regards to their employer is highly dependent on the nature of their relationship and the temperament of the employer. The focus groups tended to have the same employer per group. Those who have good relationships with their employers expressed loyalty towards them, faith in their character and rely on them not only for their livelihoods but their health and security needs as well even though they were paid below minimum wage. In some cases factory owners will warn their employees of police raids ahead of time and close their factory for security. Some migrants also reported their employers assisting them financially when their relatives needed to go to the clinic or were arrested. In other cases employers will use police raids as management tools to dispose of workers they feel are problematic. Thus different employers have different circumstances and predispositions so their management style in regards to migrant workers will differ as well. The likelihood

or necessity for migrants to perform acts of everyday resistance at their workplace therefore also depends on the management style of their employers.

While the motivations of migrants to utilize strategies to secure their livelihoods may seem predominantly economic in nature, there are other contributing factors. Job insecurity directly affects the ability of an individual to access to health services and their ability to provide sustenance for their family. Therefore while migrant strategies for seeking employers in Mae Sot are arguably of the highest importance to migrants the strategic responses to job insecurity in Mae Sot include a "reliance on localized networks of friends, family, and co-workers to find work at a different job site" (Aung, 2012:p.88). Relying on the collection and exchange of information through this network is a characteristic of migrant strategies concerning the police and documentation as well. This means that public spaces such as tea shops are important settings for migrants to be able to access these networks that aid them addressing challenges that emerge from everyday politics. Use of technology such as mobile phones can stand in for access to such space. In the words of Aung: "That such space exists, and grows when possible, is thus an important component of economic self-protection for migrant communities." (ibid).

During his fieldwork and previous research on migrant strategies in the workplace in Mae Sot Aung noted that the options for mitigating, evading or containing marginalizing actions of employers are limited: "Indeed, previous research suggests options for limiting threats to personal security in precarious work settings can be few. In response to harassment or violence at one's workplace, some migrants have reported moving to a different employer or even returning to Burma. These responses require a degree of fluidity in local labour markets, as well as the maintenance of networks that enable cross-border movement in cases of emergency." (Aung, 2012:p.98). This observation combined with the trend observed by the YCOWA of decreased reliance on them and increased usage of the evasion based strategy, matches the data from my fieldwork which also found that what they would do if their employer mistreated them moving away was the primary answer.

Aung's observation that "the general, if not exhaustive, exclusion of migrant communities from formalized contract employment, a reality due to two decades of failed registration schemes and a host of additional socio-political factors, is surely a central attribute of economic insecurity among migrant communities. Flexible, precarious work dominates the employment landscape in the area." (Aung, 2012:p.90) highlights how border partial citizenship limits the employment opportunities of Burmese migrant workers. This limitation increases the dependence of migrant workers on employers in the sectors

they are allowed to work in. Furthermore Aung previous work found that outside of challenges to securing a livelihood posed by their employers weak job security, seasonal agricultural and production patterns, shifting economic cycles, the constant threat of extortion, raids and mass arrest are all factors beyond migrants control that impact their livelihoods (Aung, 2012). The vulnerability of migrants to these factors is a consequence of their living under a regime of border partial citizenship which takes away virtually all their rights as workers and individuals. Therefore it is possible that a combination of limited employment opportunities and a heightened vulnerability to factors outside their control due to border partial citizenship contributes to a lack of strategic responses to harassment in their workplace as they are dependent on their employers and have almost no protection against their marginalizing actions outside of leaving them, appealing to their good side, or reporting them to NGOs.

Unlike the strategies developed regarding the police which are centered on evasion, migrant strategies regarding employers are based on seeking them out, mitigating their negative actions and at times evasion. The relationship between migrants and their employers is also more complex in nature than the generally conflictual migrant-police relationship. Depending on the temperament and disposition of the employer some migrant-employer relationships are negative, some are positive, almost familial in nature, and others are ambivalent. When harassment in the workplace occurs the primary strategic responses are to find a new place of employment, going on strike or contacting relevant NGO's but the first appears to be the strategy of choice.

The relationship between employers and their migrant workers is related to their legal position because the asymmetrical nature of that relationship is partially enabled by the legal position of the latter under border partial citizenship. The legal position for the majority of migrant workers in Thailand, across all documentation statuses, is one that is defined by the laws in place and the systemic violation of some of those laws. Under Thai law migrant workers cannot leave the province to which they have been registered without the written permission of their employers nor can they assemble to form unions. All migrant workers, even undocumented ones, have certain rights under Thai law such as the right to a minimum wage of 300 baht (8.69 euro) a day these are systematically not enforced. Because of this employers often violate laws protecting the rights of migrant workers without any legal ramifications. Employers take advantage of this by paying them below minimum wage, making them work longer than legally permitted though forced overtime and illegally withhold their legal documents from them. This last practice ensures that migrants workers, legal or illegal, are susceptible to arrest if stopped by police outside of their workplace. Consequently employers benefit from this asymmetrical relationship because

it allows them to have a cheap and flexible workforce and police benefit from the presence of illegal immigrants in the workforce because they receive financial compensation for not arresting them in their workplace and for arresting them outside their workplace. Thus within the migrant-employer relationship the balance of power is heavily skewed in favor of the employer because in practice migrant workers occupy a precarious legal position..

Conversely the relationship between an employer and a migrant worker can affect the legal status of the latter. As written above the temperament of the employer is more of a deciding factor in how a migrant is compensated, accommodated and treated in the workplace than existing laws, once again indicating an asymmetrical relationship. It is this asymmetrical relationship that enables the temperament and actions of employers to have a direct effect on the legal status of their workers. This is most evident when employers who kept the legal documents of their employees refuse to return them, forcing their legal status to change from documented to undocumented. Conversely migrant workers who have positive relationships with their employer, as indicated by the focus group discussion with migrants who work at the recycling factory, are more likely to not experience having their documentation withheld. In summary the legal position of migrant workers and the relationship between migrants and their employer influence one another. The marginalized legal position of migrant workers enables the power dynamic in the relationship between the two to be skewed in favour of the employer and because of this an employer can directly determine the legal position of their workers if they choose to.

The manner in which the Thai state exerts its rule over its migrant worker subjects greatly benefits employers and other economic actors. By wielding their governmentality to produce border partial citizens that serve as cheap labor employers have a large pool of workers available with whom they can ignore labor laws with relatively little consequences due to their partial legal position. Additionally their marginalized legal position heightens their reliance on the temperament of their employers in terms of satisfactory livelihood and living conditions as they cannot rely on enforcement of relevant laws. Some migrants rely on their employers to navigate the challenges of their partial citizenship regarding the manner in which police exert their power over them though there exist strategies should they cannot be relied upon or available in the moment. Therefore the legal position of migrants and their relationship with their employer links to governmentality as employers are a beneficiary of their produced legal position all while being depended upon to protect their employees from the downsides of this legal position.

Many migrants go to Mae Sot in hopes of finding better paying jobs in bigger cities such as

Chiang Mai and Bangkok. Hence there exists an outflow of migrants leaving the borderlands which threatens the supply of cheap labour of local businesses (Lee, 2011). The migration of Burmese workers from the border area challenges the efforts to local employers to reap the financial benefits of Mae Sot's spatial position as the primary entry point for migration into Thailand as well as the efforts of national and regional state actors to develop the city into a major export processing zone that can rely on a steady supply of cheap migrant labor (Campbell, 2018). To avoid labour shortage and loss of profits Mae Sot business owners used several tactics to hinder this flow and stabilize their labour supply. Firstly they became less willing to arrange registration for the migrants they employed. Second, after lobbying by employers travel restrictions were implemented in 2012 by the government of Tak Province to curb the outflow of migrants. Third, employers withheld the documentation of their legal employees making them subject to arrest outside of their workplace. Fourth, when their workers decided to quit employers refused to return their legal documents or sign the required forms to issue work transfer documents (ibid). The means by which employers sought to restrict their workers ability to seek better economic opportunities elsewhere employers demonstrates how the spatial position of Burmese migrant workers in the borderlands in part determines the migrant-employer relationship and the significant degree of influence an employer has over the life of their workers. The first, third and fourth tactics indicate how the process of legalization and maintenance of that status under the regime of border partial citizenship essentially depends on the willingness of the employer to cooperate and their temperament. The second indicates how employers can coordinate with policymakers and police to maintain the marginalization of migrant workers through the regime of border partial citizenship. These tactics also provoke the reaction that is migrant strategies because though these obstacles exist migrant have and continue to find ways to overcome them through the acquisition of documentation, brokers, evasion and their informal network. That employers perceived the movements of their workers as a threat also indicates the pivotal role the limitation of their spatial mobility plays in the maintenance of socio-economic system of Mae Sot. Without the restriction of migrants mobility numerous businesses would experience labour shortage and consequently affect the economic development of the city. Prior to the travel restrictions implemented in 2012 several factories experienced a significant decline in their workforce numbers and were forced to close due to being unable to complete their order. Thus the economic and political actors in the borderlands seek to maintain the benefits they derive from their spatial position and the system of border partial citizenship though the limitation of migrants mobility in coordination with one another. This in turn provokes and inspires new strategies by migrants to overcome the limitation of their mobility.

Employers are a significant contributor to the marginalized social position that migrants occupy

in Mae Sot. By confiscating their documentation they deprive them of their spatial mobility and the few protections their legal status offers. By making them work in a manner that violates labor laws they hamper the further growth of their economic opportunities. By colluding with the police or at the very least being given preferential treatment by their turning a blind eye to these violations migrants continue to be treated as second class border partial citizens meant only for cheap labour. Employers benefit from the system of border partial citizenship as it enables them to carry out these marginalizing actions. These actions have knock on effects into how migrants perceive their own position in Thai society and their feeling that they were not welcome and only seen as a source of labor. As a result some choose to isolate themselves and limit their interactions to other migrants. Their work environments did not give them opportunities to learn Thai, interact with Thais and their experiences with the police led them to limit their own mobility as a tactic. Paradoxically some employers are also the means through which migrants integrate themselves further into Thai society by giving them an opportunity to work in Mae Sot, learn Thai and interact with other Thais though this scenario applied to only a minority of those I interviewed. During my time in Mae Sot I frequented a noodle bar that employed a young Burmese girl no older than ten. Her Thai employer paid for her work visa, that the girl went to a Thai school and her time working in the noodle shop had led her to earn and income. These actions lead to her being more integrated into Thai society than other migrants I interviewed who voluntarily excluded themselves from Thai society for various reasons.

Given that the socio-economic position of an individual is determined by their income, education and occupation the question of the extent to which the economic position of migrant workers is determined by their employers is primarily related to income and occupation. As it has been frequently mentioned the wages a migrant worker earns in Thailand is often below the minimum wage. The actual salary varies on a case by case basis as it is determined by the employer and occupation. Factors that affect the net income include whether the cost of accommodation, food, or registration is deducted by the employer. Additional factors also include the willingness of employers to cooperate with demands of migrant workers after a strike or in some cases the willingness of employers to pay their wages. The combination of these factors, all of which are decided on by employers, directly affect the income of Burmese migrant workers in Mae Sot and thus their economic position. The previously mentioned tactics employers resorted to restrict the flow of migrant workers leaving Mae Sot also affected their socioeconomic positions in multiple ways. Fully documented migrants are more likely to earn enough income from their employment to cover their necessary expenses compared to those are undocumented or have temporary documentation (IOM, 2015). Therefore when employers decide not to register their

workers, to only hire the undocumented, to withhold their legal documents and refuse to return them, this directly affects their levels of income as well as their ability to legally seek better economic opportunities elsewhere in Thailand.

The relationship between migrants and their employers is strongly linked to globalization in several ways. When understanding globalization as the increasing interconnectedness of countries to a global market fluctuations in supply and demand can directly impact migrants and their income as some are paid by piece produced which is dependent on orders made. This is because Burmese migrants and their employers occupy a position in the global supply chain and when a shock occurs both are affected. When understanding globalization in terms of labor migration flows it is important to remember that though Burmese migrants often find themselves marginalized and exploited by their employers in Thailand they sought out these jobs these employers offer and continue to do so despite the treatment they receive. The persistence of the flows of migrant workers and upon arrival staying in Thailand for years indicates that migrants are a conscious strategic judgement that for many remaining in Thailand is more conducive towards their goal of improving their economic position than returning to Burma. Additionally the persistence of these flows provides employers few incentives to maintain a good relationship as they have a large pool of replacements to choose from. In order to improve their economic position migrants actively seek to form a relationship with employers. When this relationship does not produce satisfactory results in terms of their goals migrants will commonly seek another employer to form a relationship with another one. In order employers to improve their own economic position some also seek out migrant workers, sometimes in Burma offering them work permits. While the relationship is asymmetrical in terms of power dynamics it is nevertheless a symbiotic one as both fundamentally have a goal of improving their economic position though they are not necessarily working together to meet these goals.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

To answer the research question of this paper two sub questions were addressed first: 1) What is the legal status of migrants in Mae Sot and 2) what are the strategies of migrants in Mae Sot in light of their marginalized position? The impact of the border partial citizenship on a migrant worker of Burmese origin in Mae Sot and the strategies migrants employ as a response, whether pre-emptively or as a response, are the top-down and bottom-up lens that are used in this paper to answer these questions in order to examine the position of the Burmese migrant workers in the border city. I have shown that whether a migrant worker is fully documented or not on paper their legal status in practice is that of

border partial citizens. This means that their legal status is essentially that of a second class citizen, produced by the state for the purpose of cheap labor regardless of documentation status. How documented and undocumented migrants experience their legal position in Mae Sot is generally similar in terms of occupation, income and treatment by employers with the exception of increased mobility for the documented due to the police no longer targeting them. The shift in treatment by policemen is a recent development that shows that the manner in which the legal status of migrants in Mae Sot is interpreted is contextual. I have also shown that migrants have numerous strategies in place to mitigate the marginalizing aspects of border partial citizenship. For each position, whether economic, legal, social or spatial there is generally a strategy in place to overcome the obstacle that is presented. Many of these strategies are forms of everyday resistance that primarily rely on informal networks and evasion manifested in various forms. Migrants display significant agency and have a significant influence on their own positions. Taking into account migrants agency and active participation in the determination to their various positions is key to not only avoid portraying them as passive victims but also to an understanding of all the elements that shape the position.

The primary research question of this research paper asks how Burmese migrants experience and perceive their social position in Thailand. The position of the migrant in Thailand has been examined from the social, legal, economic, and spatial dimensions through the conceptual framework of marginalization, governmentality, globalization and borderland dynamics respectively. These aforementioned dimensions of their position overlap, intersect, are interconnected and influence one another. A commonality that the social, legal, economic and spatial positions of migrants share are the roles documentation, employers and police play in each, overlapping to a degree as well.

Documentation determines the legal position of migrants, impacts the economic opportunities they have, is a source of exclusion from Thai society and is a result of their spatial position in Thailand. Furthermore it is a tool employed by the Thai state to control and survey the movement of migrants in Thailand. It is also a means for many police officers to extort money from migrants should they not have any or have one they deem to be invalid. Conversely documentation is also a tool used by migrants to facilitate their movements and avoid extortion. Additionally employers use their ability to provide work permits to entice migrants into working for them as well as their ability to confiscate them as a means to gain leverage, limit their mobility and ensure the migrant will work until the cost of the work permit has been paid off. For all three actors this tool has limits in its efficiency. For migrants, the efficiency of their documentation is tied to the organization that issued it, where it is used and the temperament of local

authorities who can arbitrarily decide the validity of the document. For the police, frequently changing migration policies resulted in multiple forms of identification being accepted. For employers, confiscating documentation as a means of control does not deter some migrants from leaving as the differences between being legal and illegal are not significant enough in terms of benefits in the eyes of migrant workers.

Employers are an important factor in whether a migrant will be working and living in Thailand legally or not. They decide on the income and thus the economic position they will have. The dependence employers have on migrant labor and the quantity of migrants seeking out low-skill work contributes to the perception of migrants social position as a source of cheap labor. Their management style and treatment of their employees contributes towards whether migrants are integrated or excluded from Thai society. The number and interests of employers in diverse sectors in the Thai borderlands contribute the impact the spatial position of migrants have on them as employers and the state more often than not collude and coordinate with one another to benefit from the presence of migrants. There are three branches of migrant strategies regarding employers. Strategies to seek out employers, mitigating undesirable actions on the part of employers, and evasion. The relationship between migrants and employers is highly dependent on the temperament of employers and management style. Some treat their employees akin to an extended family and take care of their needs beyond what they are required to do such as helping family members of their employees with medical bills for example. Most migrants interviewed expressed feeling neutral in how they were treated and were judged by their performance at work. Others felt discriminated against and taken advantage of. Should their treatment become unbearable many choose to leave and find a new source of employment while some contact NGO's, CBO's or organize strikes.

While police do not determine a migrants legal position in the same way a migrants documentation status does, in encounters at checkpoints or in the streets they possess some flexibility in deciding whether or not the document presented is legally valid or not. In this sense a migrants legal position can unofficially be determined by the police officer in question. Police affect the economic status of migrants primarily by extorting money, arresting or deporting them which affect their finances as money is lost through bribes, paying back employers for bail or hours not worked. The social position of migrants as marginalized individuals is compounded by their being targeted by police for extortion, ignoring violations of laws protecting them, upholding laws of exception and in general treating them in a different manner than Thais or other foreigners are treated. Once again the spatial position of the police

and migrants in the Thai borderlands enables these actions all of which impact how migrants experience and perceive their spatial position.

Borderland dynamics/Spatial position

The spatial position of Burmese migrant workers in the Thai-Burma borderlands impacts their experience and perception of living in Mae Sot in several ways. People are subject to the laws and policies of the country they find visit, work or live in. Burmese migrant workers are subjects to the regime of border partial citizenship and its laws and policies that enforced by the local police, taken advantage of by employers all of which contribute to the experience of their spatial position in the borderlands. These experiences include the limitation of their mobility, monetary extortion by police, the nature of their work, collusion between police and employers and more. These experiences inform the development and employment of strategies by migrant to mitigate or evade these actions. Furthermore the system by which border partial citizenship registers migrants is the very process that produces marginalized individuals by denying them their rights. Border partial citizenship is in summary the legal and political mechanism that influence life experience in Mae Sot and the borderlands. The partiality of citizenship Burmese workers in the borderlands enable police and employers to marginalize them in ways not normally possible with Thais or other foreigners. It also enables migrants to use strategies that would not be as effective elsewhere in Thailand. Additionally the manner in which each actor views the presence of Burmese migrant workers in the spatial area of Mae Sot also provides some insight into how migrants experience this position. Migrants view their presence as necessary, police view it as illegal and employers view it as an opportunity cheap labor and all three ultimately view it as an opportunity for financial gain. The perception of migrants regarding the necessity of their presence in Thailand for the improvement of their livelihoods lead them to develop strategies that take into account and make use of the specificity of their spatial position to their benefit whether it be for finding new sources of income, navigating checkpoints or evading the authorities. An experience that stood out to me in the field was how every focus group laughed at the question of whether they feared deportation. The ease of undoing the consequences of deportation would not be possible were it not for their spatial position near the border. In a sense the spatial position of migrants in Mae Sot is the background to which their experiences with their economic, legal and social position take place.

Marginalization/Social position

In Thailand one's perceived social status will influence how people assume another's documentation status. This impacts how migrants experience and perceive their social position because it

is an everyday reality for many. The experience of life in Mae Sot for expats such as the Burmese doctor I met and a Burmese factory worker of a similar age to him differ in how they are treated by Thai society. Historically the perception of the Burmese in the Thai imagined history has been negative as a result of conflicts in the past and the portrayal of the Burmese as a historical national enemy in textbooks. External appearance can also play a role in how Thai soldiers or policemen will interact with bus and car passengers at checkpoints going from Mae Sot to Chiang Mai. Of foreign, Thai and Burmese or hill tribe passengers it is usually the latter two that are asked questions. Police and employers contribute to the marginalized social position of migrants. Police do so by targeting them for extortion and not upholding laws when crimes are committed against them. Employers do so by confiscating their documents and not respecting their rights regarding livelihood, working and living conditions. These actions in turn contribute to the perception by some that Thailand is not their home and that they are seen only as a source of cheap labour. Those who have lived in Thailand for most of their lives and speak Thai tended to perceive it as their home even though they may experience marginalization from Thai society. Some of the observed social exclusion of migrants is voluntary in nature. Reasons for socially excluding themselves were varied: fear of arrest, no interest with engaging in social life outside of their community, not having enough time after work. Not being able to speak Thai is something many migrants interviewed attributed to their lack of relationships with Thais outside of work. The social position of Burmese workers in Mae Sot is a marginalized one but my impression from my time with migrants is that they perceive their position more as an unfortunate aspect of life in Thailand but one that they are willing to tolerate due to the improvement of their overall position compared to their life in Burma.

Governmentality/Legal position

Governmentality is key to understanding the legal position of migrant workers in Thailand. By looking at the policies implemented by the government and how they are applied in practice through the perspective of governmentality the logic behind the Thai state's decision on who is legal and illegal can come to light. The legal position of Burmese workers in Mae Sot is tied to governmentality as their documentation status is issued by the Thai state. However regardless of documentation status the experience of their legal position remain similar in that they are almost denied the labor rights, protection and entitlements of Thai citizens and expats. From the perspective of the state the legal position of migrants is legal so long as they work in a permitted demarcated space. Living, travelling and working outside of this space renders their position illegal. Hence the partiality of their legal position. Though a migrant may present a valid form of documentation a police officer still has discretionary power in deciding whether the legality of the individuals status. In this regard the ability of the migrant workers to

navigate their legal position in Mae Sot is strongly shaped by the presence of the “hybrid regime” that Lee observed. Non-thai communities and organization issue identity cards that are generally recognized by local police giving flexibility to the downsides of their legal position. To the migrants I interviewed the legality of their position is closer to a convenience than a necessity. Full documentation provides some benefits but not significant in terms of meeting their goal of improvement of their ability to support themselves and their family. Nevertheless the strategic value of this convenience is recognized and sought out and when it cannot be obtained legally it is strategies are in place to obtain it through other channels when possible. Thus the legal position of migrants is not exclusively determined by the governmentality state but also themselves. A shift in the migrants experience of the governmentality of the Thai state in Mae Sot is the change in pattern of who local police target for extortion. The observation made during my fieldwork that police in the past few years targeted migrant workers with work permits for extortion less frequently as not been found in other relevant literary sources to my knowledge. While a minority of Burmese migrants in Mae Sot have work permits this nevertheless indicates a change in how they experience their legal position and Thai governmentality as they report feeling safer and satisfaction from having the ability to travel in town without fear of extortion or arrest. The common practice of employers confiscating their work permits however undoes the benefits of this change. As the majority of Burmese migrant workers come to Mae Sot to find work the marginalization of their legal position by employers strongly skews the power dynamic of their relationship in favor of the latter. It is in this manner that employers can influence the legal position of migrant workers and consequently how they experience and perceive it

Globalization/Economic position

The economic position of Burmese migrant workers in Mae Sot is defined by their income, education and occupation. These indicators influence the documentation status they will receive. Of the migrants I interviewed the primary reason for legally or illegally immigrating to Thailand is to improve their economic position as their financial situation in Burma was not enough to meet their needs. While the overall experience of their documentation between the fully and non documented is similar there are some differences they offer in terms of economic position. A fully documented migrants is more likely to have an income that can cover their expenses. Furthermore they are more likely to work in jobs that employ them all year long resulting in higher incomes. Thus fully documented migrants tend to have a better economic position than undocumented migrants. The regime of border partial citizenship has laws that limit the occupation a migrant worker can have to low-skilled job as well as limiting their ability to

travel to other cities to find better paying work, thus affecting their income and economic position. The strategic non application of laws regarding minimum wages also directly affects the income aspect of their economic position. This is done intentionally as the state and employers desire migrants to occupy this economic position as it maintains their status as a cheap and exploitable workforce. Employers, being that actors that decides the occupation and income of the person working for them, thus they are an important determinant of a migrant workers economic position.

Migrants can also determine their economic position. Leaving their life in Burma behind and migrating to Thailand shows that the ability to improve their lives is also in their hands. Because of their coming to Thailand with the goal of improving their economic position migrants actively seek the establishment of a relationship with employers. To draw in workers employers offer incentives that attract employees such as work permits and an income higher that what they had in Burma. Both migrants and employers, despite the asymmetrical relationship between the two, look to one another for the strengthening of their economic position. Should this relationship not produce the desired outcome in terms of income and livelihood a common recourse is to seek out another employer instead or to organize strikes or contact NGO's or CBO's that can assist them. By securing identity cards, through employers, brokers or their informal network, that enable them to interact with the police unmolested they protect their economic position by avoiding a loss of income that results from paying bribes or bail. Thus the economic position of migrants in Mae Sot is influenced by the state, employers and the migrants themselves.

Final Note

The case of Burmese migrant workers in Mae Sot can be applied to other migrants in Thailand from Cambodia and Laos. After Burma, Cambodia and Laos are the biggest source of migrant labour flows entering Thailand. The system of border partial citizenship was developed to benefit from the presence of migrant workers from these three countries (Pongsawat, 2007). Available literature has shown that there are parallels in the treatment of Cambodian and Migrant workers by employers and police. It is also the experience of Cambodian workers of having been extorted for money by the police or have their documents confiscated by their employers (Chaisuparakul, 2015). As they are subject to the same structural marginalization that Burmese migrants experience in Mae Sot it is possible that there may be parallels in the strategies Cambodian and Lao migrants employ to mitigate the undesirable actions of the Thai state.

Their experiences extend beyond the Thai-Burma borderlands and can be found in most border towns, in the heartland of Thailand as well and indeed in other border societies in different parts of the world. Mahachai is a small coastal town near Bangkok and is home to one of Thailand's largest seafood markets. The town is also known for its significant number of migrant workers and recently has been in international headlines for cases of migrant workers working in the fishing industry in conditions of slavery. Here migrants also experience the system of border partial citizenship and its laws and policies. The experience of being a border partial citizen can be carried far beyond the borderlands through the preformative actions of the migrant workers, Thai locals, institutions and organizations (Areprachakun, 2017).

In most of the literature found regarding migrants in Mae Sot the perspective taken was either from the perspective of the state or the migrant, rarely a combination of both. By taking the approach of examining their situation in a top-down manner through border partial citizenship and a bottom-up manner through migrant strategies a more complete picture of the dynamics of the life of a migrants emerges. This paper has shown that while there are many structural factors that determine the various positions migrants occupy, migrants also have a significant degree of influence on how these positions are experienced.

Word Count: 42380

Appendix

Title	Name	Job	Date	Place
Interview 1	Name is anonymized	Factory worker	22/01/2017	Mae Sot
Interview 2	Name is anonymized	Daycare in migrant community	22/01/2017	Mae Sot
Interview 3	Name is anonymized	Factory worker	22/01/2017	Mae Sot
Interview 4	Name is anonymized	Factory worker	22/01/2017	Mae Sot
Interview 5	Name is anonymized	Social worker	23/01/2017	Mae Sot
Interview 6	Name is anonymized	Factory worker	23/01/2017	Mae Sot
Interview 7	Name is anonymized	Delivery boy	23/01/2017	Mae Sot
Interview 8	Name is anonymized	Farmer	24/01/2017	Mae Sot
Interview 9	Name is anonymized	Community worker	24/01/2017	Mae Sot
Focus Group 1	-	-	20/01.2017	Mae Sot
Focus Group 2	-	-	20/01/2017	Mae Sot
Focus Group 3	-	-	20/01/2017	Mae Sot
Focus Group 4	-	-	21/01/2017	Mae Sot
Focus Group 5	-	-	21/01/2017	Mae Sot

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