

The Construction of Othering: The Study of Migrant Workers from Myanmar in  
Samut Sakhon Province, Thailand

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## Abstract

The issue of migrants from Myanmar working in Thailand became significant in 2015 when numerous famous foreign news outlets reported about conditions of slave labor in Thailand. The Thai military government launched several immediate policies in order to deal with the issue and improve Thailand's image. Even though the image of the state was enhanced, the problems about migrant workers from Myanmar still exist: migrant workers from Myanmar are still exploited and looked down upon by many native-born people. Therefore, in this dissertation, I investigate the stories, life experiences, and problems of migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand. Drawing from close to twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork in Samut Sakhon Province, I argue that migrant workers from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon Province are economically and socially segmented and exploited at different scales through three ways of being constructed as Other: space, politics, and identities.

Concerning spatial aspects, I discuss how migrant workers' social networks, government policies, job opportunities, income, brokers, and social and cultural preferences influence migrant workers' decisions to come and work in Samut Sakhon Province. Consequently, the area has become a cultural safe-haven for migrant workers from Myanmar. However, the area has also become an ethnic enclave causing people who reside there to be seen as others. Second, considering political aspects, I focus directly on how state actors view and manage migrant workers from Myanmar. Migrant workers from Myanmar have been intentionally constructed as others and as problems in Thailand not because they are sources of the problems, but because their insecure status (being problems and others) enables numerous Thai people and officials to exploit them. Finally, in terms of identity aspects, I focus on how they routinely encounter other

workers in the factory and how the migrant workers are excluded by other workers. Based on my empirical study, I found that identities are a significant factor that divides people into in-group and out-group. However, I also illustrate several cases in which migrant workers were accepted by the native-born group members by the strategic use of identity in a new environment.

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### **List of Acronyms**

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ID	Identity Document
ILO	International Labor Organization
IPEC	International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
LPN	Labor Rights Promotion Network
MMC	Myanmar Mingalabar Center
MOU	Memoranda of Understandings
NCPO	National Council for Peace and Order
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
TVPA	Trafficking Victims Protection Act

## **Chapter 1. Our enemy, Burmese people: The beginning of my stories with migrant workers from Myanmar**

“ในอดีตคนพม่าเข้ามายึดและทำลายอยุธยาตอนนี้พวกเขาก็ย้ายมาออกนอกออกหลานมายึดประเทศเราอีก” [In the past, Burmese people destroyed Ayutthaya Kingdom; and, now, they are seizing our country again by moving and giving birth in Thailand.]

- Thai person I met in Samut Sakhon Province

When I was young, I was taught to hate people from Myanmar because they were our historical enemies. They had burned down our cities, ruined numerous historic temples, and destroyed our state. People from Myanmar were depicted as dangerous criminals, and fear towards them was perpetuated by the people around me, the news, and public media. These perspectives did not affect my daily life, however. I lived in a city where people from Myanmar were rarely seen. I never met anyone from Myanmar when I lived in my hometown. My mother's hometown, however, is in Samut Sakhon Province (presently the biggest Burmese community in Thailand), and my family and I had to go there every year to visit my grandparents (who were Chinese migrants). My grandparents lived in the countryside of Samut Sakhon. There were numerous ethnic Chinese, ethnic Mon, and Thai people living together in that area. Twenty years ago, I did not see people from Myanmar working there, except for a few migrant workers in the center of Samut Sakhon, mainly in fishery sectors and occasionally (secretly) in factories. They rarely appeared in public because most of them were undocumented. Therefore, when I

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<sup>1</sup> a Siamese kingdom that existed from 1350 to 1767.

would go to the center of Samut Sakhon to buy seafood, I hardly saw them. At the time, I did not know that the significant barrier between Thai people and people from Myanmar was instilled by Thai education and media. Currently however, as the presence and overall population of migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand continue to grow, so have Thai people's negative depictions of migrant workers as dangerous outsiders who have come to seize Thailand.

With this perspective instilled through education, news, and social media, boundaries between Thai people and migrant workers from Myanmar are constantly being recreated. Despite this, few people try to clarify whether or not these portrayals of migrant workers are correct. Are migrant workers from Myanmar dangerous? Are they coming to seize Thailand? Are they creating problems in Thailand? Furthermore, no one questions who has the power to create the image of migrant workers from Myanmar. Who is creating the perspective? Why and how did/do they create this perspective? More significantly, no one has illustrated the reasons and practical forms of the boundaries that are targeted towards migrant workers from Myanmar. How are boundaries formed? How can they be reduced? In this dissertation, I want to present stories of migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand. I also want to contribute to a better understanding of the image of migrant workers from Myanmar, the perspectives and the management of migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand, the boundaries between workers of different ethnicities in factories, and ways to reduce boundaries between migrant workers from Myanmar and Thai people. In order to do so, I focus on illustrating the stories of the migrant workers from Myanmar in Mahachai, also known as Samut Sakhon Province, the biggest Burmese community in Thailand.

### **Samut Sakhon and the Mahachai area**

Samut Sakhon province is generally referred to as 'Mahachai' and is located next to the seashore of the Thai Gulf and the estuary of the Tha Chin River. In the Ayutthaya period, Samut Sakhon Province was called 'Ban Tha Chin' or Tha Chin Village, meaning 'The Village of Chinese Port.' While originally an anchorage for Chinese junks during the Ayutthaya period, Chinese traders decided to settle and live in the area (Samut Sakhon City, 2009), creating a small Chinese community. In 1556, the small village of 'Ban Tha Chin' had developed into Sakhon Buri City. It was used as a place for mobilization, acting as the first line of defense of Ayutthaya from enemies who would come to attack the city through the sea (Samut Sakhon City, 2009). In the late Ayutthaya period, King Sanpetch VIII would come to Sakhon Buri through the canal route. However, the canal (from the capital to Sakhon Buri) was very treacherous. During one of his transits, his boat collided with a large tree branch, and his boat collapsed. Thus, he had a direct canal dug from the capital to Sakhon Buri. The new canal was named 'Mahachai Canal'. Since then, the word 'Mahachai' (great victory) has been widely used by people living in the area (Samut Sakhon City, 2009). During the King Rama IV period, Sakhon Buri was changed to Samut Sakhon, meaning the city of sea and river. In 1933, the word 'city' was further changed to the word 'province' (Samut Sakhon City, 2009). Accordingly, Sakhon Buri City has become Samut Sakhon Province.

Samut Sakhon Province is located in the western part of lower central Thailand. Located approximately 40 kilometers from Bangkok, and only 5 kilometers from the sea shore of the Gulf of Thailand (Samut Sakhon City, 2009) the boundaries of Samut Sakhon Province connect with

Bangkok, Nakhon Pathom, Ratchaburi and Samut Songkhram. The total area of Samut Sakhon is around 870 square kilometers, including three districts: Muang Samut Sakhon, Krathumban and Ban Phaeo (Samut Sakhon City, 2009). Geographically, Mahachai is only a subdistrict of the Muang Samut Sakhon district. However, currently Mahachai can also refer to the Muang Samut Sakhon district or the entire Samut Sakhon Province.



Figure 1: Bangkok and Samut Sakhon, Thailand

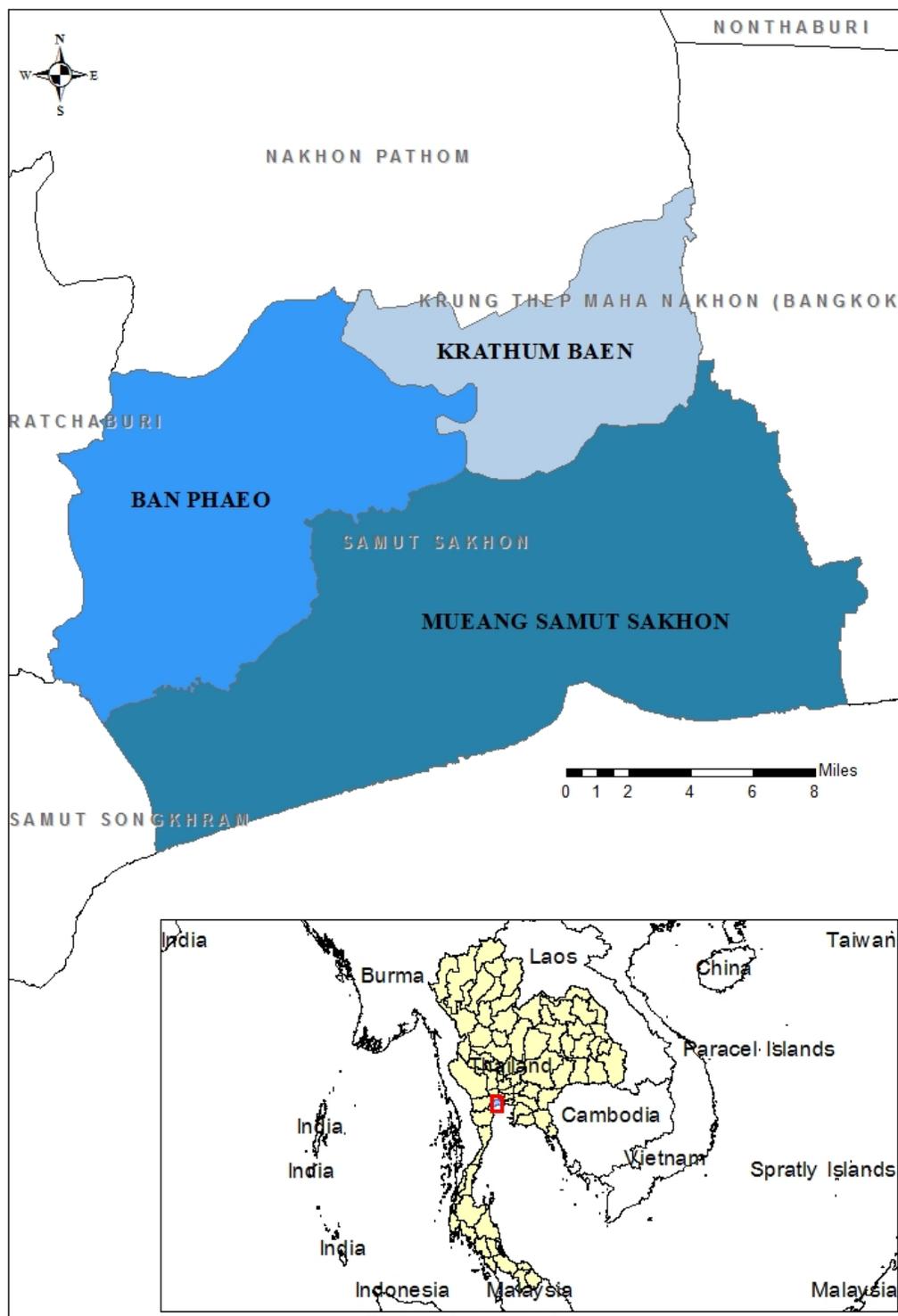


Figure 2: Samut Sakhon Province, Thailand

## **Economy of Samut Sakhon Province**

Economically, Samut Sakhon Province produces a lot of income for the nation. Its GDP consistently ranks in the top ten when compared to other provinces in Thailand. The major economic activities in Samut Sakhon Province are fishing, agriculture and industrial. Fishing has been the economic mainstay of Samut Sakhon Province for decades because Samut Sakhon Province is located near the 40-kilometer-long seashore (Samut Sakhon Provincial Labor Office, 2017). According to Sompong Srakaew (2016), the founder of the Labor Rights Promotion Network (LPN) in Thailand, the fishery sector was developed several decades ago, a time in which a sufficient labor force had not yet developed locally. The employers had, thus, brought labor from neighboring countries. Currently, a majority of workers in the fishery sector are migrant workers from Myanmar. However, working in the fishery sector is very difficult. Therefore, when these workers are given the opportunity, they will move to work in other sectors, such as the industrial sector.

Samut Sakhon is the site of numerous manufacturers covering a wide range of industries, including but not limited to seafood, seafood processing, plastic, metal, textiles, and agriculture (Samut Sakhon Provincial Labor Office, 2017). A majority of manufacturers in Samut Sakhon Province belong to the seafood and seafood processing industries. For example, Thailand is the largest tuna processor in the world. Most of the tuna processed in Thailand is done in factories with thousands of workers in Samut Sakhon (Baird and Quastel, 2011). Accordingly, the industrial sector in Samut Sakhon Province requires countless laborers. In the early 1990s, factory jobs were mainly held by local and native-born workers from northeastern or northern

Thailand, as it was thought that migrant workers from Myanmar had not yet come to work in Samut Sakhon. However, based on interviews with migrant workers from Myanmar, there were some migrant workers from Myanmar working in the factories in the 1990s. These migrant workers used their social networks to come to work in the Mahachai area and began to replace the native-born workers. According to interviews with some employers in Samut Sakhon Province, factory owners preferred to hire migrant workers because they were very industrious, and at the time, the wage of migrant workers was lower than the wage of native-born workers. When the native-born workers quit their jobs, the owners of the factories chose to hire migrant workers rather than native-born workers. While some native workers quit their factory jobs for better opportunities, others decided to quit because they did not want to work with the migrant workers.

Consequently, a majority of workers in the industrial sector of Samut Sakhon Province are currently migrant workers from Myanmar. However, based on interviews with previous owners of seafood factories, due to the issue of human trafficking and slave labor in the Mahachai area in 2015, many small seafood factories have been shut down. Workers from Myanmar who had worked in these closed factories either moved to work in other seafood factories or decided to go back to Myanmar. Even though numerous small seafood manufacturers in Samut Sakhon Province were closed down, several large seafood manufacturers remain. Due to this, the seafood industry continues to be a major industry in Samut Sakhon Province.

The agricultural sector has been developed mostly in the Ban Phaeo area. The major agricultural product from Ban Phaeo is coconut. According to the owner of an agricultural

business in Ban Phaeo, owners of the fields previously grew fruits and vegetables and sold them by hand. Over time, household agriculture changed to an agricultural industry where more labor was required. This resulted in field owners hiring migrant workers from Myanmar to work in the fields, since working in the field is different from working in the factory. There are no set working hours. There is only work when the crops are ready to be harvested or when the owners want to start planting new crops. Therefore, the migrant workers are not needed to permanently stay in a field and the field owners are not obligated to pay the migrant workers daily, leading the workers to rotate labor in different fields for different owners.

Due to development of the major economic activities in Samut Sakhon Province, as explained above, Samut Sakhon Province provides numerous job opportunities for low-wage workers. However, the rapid decline in the birth rate in Thailand has resulted in much fewer young Thai workers and also, according to some factory owners as well as several older Thai workers, many young Thai workers do not want to work as low-wage workers. This leads to the demand for workers from neighboring countries. According to the migrant workers I interviewed, income in Thailand is two to three times higher than the average income in Myanmar. Therefore, job opportunities and the potential for higher income attract workers from Myanmar to come to work in Samut Sakhon Province, causing Samut Sakhon Province to become home to the biggest Burmese community in Thailand (see other factors in chapter three).

### **The Population of Samut Sakhon Province**

The population of Samut Sakhon Province consists of Thai locals and workers from different parts of the country—which include Chinese-ethnic Thai people and Mon-ethnic Thai

people—and migrant workers from Myanmar. Chinese people have been moving to Mahachai since the Ayutthaya period. They were originally Chinese traders who decided to stay in Thailand after entering (Samut Sakhon City, 2009). Some Chinese people migrated to Thailand during the Rattanakosin period (1782-1932). These Chinese people and their offspring were allowed to have Thai citizenship. Based on my interviews with Mon people in Samut Sakhon Province, Mon people migrated to Samut Sakhon Province many decades ago from Myanmar and were also allowed to become Thai citizens. My interviews with migrant workers from Myanmar and some local people also concur that migrant workers from Myanmar began moving to work in Samut Sakhon Province many decades ago. These people came from different states in Myanmar but most of them are Karen and Mon, two of eight main ethnic groups in Myanmar (Karen, Mon, Kayah, Shan, Burman, Chin, Kachin and Rakhine). Although Thai workers from different parts of Thailand also come to Samut Sakhon Province for the numerous jobs that are available, currently, the number of migrant workers from Myanmar is higher than the number of Thai people, Chinese-ethnic Thai people, and Mon-ethnic Thai people in the Mahachai area (see chapter two for more information). At present, it is difficult to differentiate who is ethnic Chinese, who is ethnic Mon and who are ethnically Thai people as differing cultures and traditions have mingled. Nevertheless, migrant workers from Myanmar have become the majority group of people in this area. Consequently, some people in Thailand call this area a ‘Myanmar town’, a dangerous place to stay.

### **Mahachai as a borderland**

A borderland is a concept mainly used by scholars who study cross-border regions. According to Gloria Anzaldua (1987), a borderland is “a vague and undermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (3). It is physically present where people of different identities occupy the same territory (Anzaldua, 1987). In geography, the term mainly refers to “geographical regions surrounding international borders” (Gregory, Johnston, Pratt, Watts and Whatmore, 2009, 53). However, the term also involves the study of people whose daily cultural and economic practices tie across borders (Gregory et al., 2009, 53). Moreover, Peter Sahlins (1998) described borderlands as “the locus of several identities and cultures operating at multiple scales” (as cited in Kaplan, 1999, 47). Borderlands tend to be “zones of cultural overlap” (Augelli, 1980, 19). Accordingly, the term borderlands can refer to the study of people with different identities and cultures and their cultural, social and economic practices that occur both in and across the borderland.

Borderlands are confined by political and/or cultural boundaries. Political boundaries articulate “the territorial limits of sovereignty by marking where the geographical extent of the state ends and a new state begins and where power, possession and legal rights change hands” (Kaplan, 1999, 46). If the political boundary coincides with the cultural boundary, the territorial line is sharp and clean. However, there are many cases where the political and cultural boundaries do not coincide. In these cases, the borderland becomes a zone of confusion referred to as a messy borderland. In the messy borderland, there is more than one spatial identity and a mix of ethnic groups (Kaplan, 1999, 47). Messy borderlands are characterized by multiple shifting identities (Wilson and Donnan, 1998). These identities are complicated by the borderland’s distance from the state center (Rumley and Minghi, 1991; and Kaplan, 1999,) and

a messy borderland can occur when political boundaries are drawn while disregarding the underlying cultural geography. They can also occur when political boundaries shift due to wars or political concessions. They can also occur through migration and assimilation which result in the shift of cultural boundaries while the political boundaries remain intact (Kaplan, 1999, 46).

It is not a political boundary that makes Mahachai a borderland but a cultural one. Mahachai is located within central Thailand and its area is inside Thailand's territory. Its territorial lines do not connect with any other country; its geographical area is not surrounded by any international border. Mahachai is a case where its political boundary does not coincide with its cultural boundaries. After the migration of people from China, Myanmar and Thailand to the Mahachai area, the cultural boundaries of Mahachai have changed while its political boundaries remain constant. There are multiple identities and a mix of ethnic groups in the Mahachai area leading to the development of many cultural boundaries. These cultural boundaries include boundaries that divide people inside and outside of the Mahachai area, and boundaries that divide people (from different ethnic groups) within the Mahachai area. The spatial identities of Mahachai have shifted and become complex. Mahachai has become a borderland, a suitable area to study ethnicity, boundaries and migrant workers.

### **Research on ethnicity, boundaries and migrant workers**

Research on ethnicity, migration, and migrant workers has been widely studied across different disciplines. Some researchers have linked the issue of ethnicity and migrant workers with ideas of identity, citizenship, and boundary (Buijs, 1993; Bhachu, 1993; Tilly, 2005; Dobrowlosky and Tastsoglow, 2006; Dobrowolsky and Lister, 2006; Ralston, 2006; Tastsoglou,

2006; Peng, 2011; and Ho and Bauder, 2012). Some researchers have connected the idea of migration with geopolitics (Nagel, 2002) and prejudice (Stephan, Ybarra and Bachman, 1999; and Powell, Butterfield and Parent, 2006), and others have focused their research on migration and diversity either in a city or in a workplace (Kossoudji, 1988; Crang, 1994; Wright, 1997; Ely and Thomas, 2001; Amin, 2002; Christian, Porter and Moffitt, 2006; Karsten, 2006; Bruce, 2006; Oerlemans and Peeters, 2009; Standifer, Lester, Schultz and Windsor 2013; Ghosh, 2014; Hernandez, 2016; and Byrd, 2016). These recent research illustrate the migrant workers' daily negotiation of ethnic difference, the migrant workers' difficulties in the workplace or the city and also the inequality between migrant workers and other workers in the workplace (Wright, 1999; Kalev, 2009; Santoso, 2009; Glucksmann, 2009 and Marr, 2016).

My research includes empirical and theoretical explanations as well as analysis of migration issues regarding ideas of ethnicity, identity, and boundaries, both in the city, like Samut Sakhon Province, and in the workplace. However, my research focuses solely on migrant workers who moved from the global South to the global South. Specifically, I only study migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand. Therefore, the ideas of identity, boundary and the stories about migrant workers presented in this research will be different from research on migrant workers who moved from the global South to the global North. In the case of global South-global South migration, Samut Sakhon province is a suitable place for analysis because of the massive migration of workers from Myanmar. Despite the Mahachai area being well-known for supporting the largest Burmese community in Thailand, nobody has conducted detailed ethnographic research in the area.

Recent studies on migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand have provided stories and fundamental backgrounds of migrant workers in Thailand (Huguet and Punpuing, 2005; Jirattikorn, 2008; Chalamwong, 2008; Sciortino and Punpuing, 2009; McLaughlin, 2010; Hall, 2011; Huguet and Chamratrithriong, 2011; Atchawanitchakun, 2011; Ekkachai and Kongchantuk, 2016; Holamyong and Panpung, 2016; and Ndegwa, 2016), in Thai-Burmese borderlands (Dannecker and Schaffar, 2016; Arnold, 2010; Pyne, 2007; and Campbell, 2017; 2018), and in northern Thailand (Latt, 2008; and Eberte and Holliday, 2011). Some researchers have worked on migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand in relation to health (Fuller and Chamratrithriong, 2009; and Baker, Holamyong and Thianlai, 2010), wages (Reagan, 2013), Thai public opinions (Niyomsilpa and Sunpawan, 2012), socialization (Campbell, 2016), and also identity (Kitjakosol, 2013). While some researchers have studied migrant workers from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon province, the research is primarily focused on gender issues (Srakaew, 2016). Therefore, research on migrant workers from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon Province remains limited.

### **Framing my research**

Most people in Thailand see migrant workers from Myanmar as enemies due to the historical conflicts between Ayutthaya and Burma. However, there are other images of migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand that are constructed. These images are constructed in different ways, by different actors and for different reasons. In this dissertation, I investigate the ways that different images of migrant workers from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon Province are constructed. I argue that migrant workers from Myanmar are depicted as ‘the Other’ through

three different means: space, perspective and management of state actors, and identities. Being constructed as ‘the Other’ leads migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand to become economically and socially segmented and exploited at different scales. This is not to suggest the image of “the enemy” that Thai culture has instilled within the population is unimportant or secondary. On the contrary, this image and the way that it is constructed play a significant role in the other three ways of the construction of Othering.

My space of study, in this case, is situated in Samut Sakhon Province. Samut Sakhon Province is the biggest Burmese labor market in Thailand. It is a pool of low-waged workers from Myanmar. Due to the numerous migrant workers in the area, many spaces have been modified to reflect the large migrant population. Spaces such as Mahachainiwet is an area in Samut Sakhon where many people from Myanmar dwell. In this space, signs and advertisements are written in Burmese, leading outsiders to view the place as a Myanmar town. While creating these spaces may provide a sense of comfort and community amongst the migrant workers, its presence may also spur racism and aggression from the surrounding Thai, Chinese, and Mon population. Aggression arises as outsiders refer to Samut Sakhon as a Myanmar town, painting both the area and its inhabitants in a negative light. As stated before, Burmese people are continuously depicted as dangerous enemies of the nation by the education system and public media. Consequently, the area is considered dangerous, and the entire population (migrant or not) is seen as Burmese (as illustrated in C.3 and C.4).

Because place makes race and race makes place, I, therefore, would like to trace back to how this space has been constructed by racism. In other words, I want to know how this space

has become the biggest Burmese community. What factors allowed this space to become a pool for migrant workers from Myanmar? Why have migrant workers decided to come here?

Accordingly, in chapter three, I investigate how Samut Sakhon Province makes race or how Samut Sakhon Province has become a Burmese ethnic niche in Thailand. According to the literature on migrant workers, social networks are the main reason that migrant workers may come to live and work in a particular area. In the case of migrant workers from Myanmar, I agree that social networks are significant in pushing migrant workers from Myanmar to work in Samut Sakhon Province. However, there are other important factors that previous research has mentioned less. Therefore, in chapter three, I illustrate other significant reasons that affect the decisions of migrant workers from Myanmar to come and work in Samut Sakhon Province. I argue that even though social networks between migrant workers from Myanmar act as dominant factors in driving migrants to the Mahachai area, other factors must be considered. Policies, job opportunities, income, social and cultural preferences, brokers, and accessibility are other significant factors that have allowed Mahachai to become the biggest Burmese labor market, providing the framework for constructing migrant workers as the Other, while simultaneously exploiting them.

The second way of the construction of the Other is by state actors. State actors, such as the central government, local government, police officials, immigration officials, public media, social media, and different populations in Thailand, are people or groups of people who have the power to control and manage migrant workers from Myanmar. They construct migrant workers from Myanmar as the Other and manage migrant workers by claiming that migrant workers from Myanmar are creating unease in Thailand. It is not always true that migrant workers from

Myanmar create problems in Thailand; however, they are consistently shown in this light. As migrant workers from Myanmar are seen as the Other and depicted as problematic, state actors can exploit migrant workers from Myanmar by taking advantage of this public view. Therefore, in chapter four, I demonstrate the views and management of the state actors. I argue that migrant workers from Myanmar are continuously discussed as aliens who are sources of problems in Thailand, not because they are creating problems but because of the ways Thai state actors view and manage them. The Thai state actors see migrant workers from Myanmar as a social and security problem and as people who can be exploited and need to be organized.

Identities are the final way that migrant workers from Myanmar are constructed as Others in my dissertation. Identities are basic elements dividing people into different groups. Identities are constructed through performative practices. They operate through exclusion or through the construction of constitutive outside (Derrida, 1981; Laclau, 1990; and Butler, 1993). The identities of migrant workers from Myanmar differ from the identities of people in Thailand; thus, Migrant workers from Myanmar are viewed or/and constructed as Other. They are excluded and exploited in Thai society. However, the idea of identity is more complex than that. People have multiple flexible identities. Identities can create boundaries or foster connections between people in the Mahachai area. Therefore, in chapter five, I illustrate how migrant workers from Myanmar are constructed as Other through the idea of identities. My illustration focuses on a micro-scale space, a workplace. This is because a workplace can provide insightful information about the relationship between workers from different identities. I examine the construction of Othering through identities by analyzing the boundaries among the workers in a Mon-dominant factory. I examine the ways workers live in the factory to better understand how they treat others

as well as how others treat them. I also examine how the workers construct themselves and others. I also show how different identities create boundaries between workers in the factory. Additionally, I illustrate the methods workers have used to reduce boundaries. Accordingly, my purpose is to show that ordinary encounters in the workplace cannot always reduce the boundaries between people from different groups. Sometimes workers in the factory still maintain their negative feelings and hostile practices while interacting with people from the out-groups; therefore, strategies are required to reduce these boundaries. Using ‘identity capital’ (Côté and Levine, 2002; and Côté, 2005; 2007) or connecting one (or more) of our identities to the group’s identity is a strategy to reduce the boundaries among the workers in the factory. Hence, identities do not only externalize people, but, in some cases, they can internalize people as well.

### **Grounding my research: the idea of space of encounter and identities**

#### *Spaces of encounter*

My research is based on two theories: spaces of encounter and identities. Drawing on the idea of spaces of encounter, I see Samut Sakhon Province as a space of encounter. The word, encounter, was raised from the late Latin ‘incontra’ which means “against, contrary or opposed to” (Wilson, 2016, 452). The Oxford English Dictionary defines encounter as “a meeting face to face; a meeting (of adversaries or opposing forces) in conflict; hence, a battle, skirmish, duel, etc.”. More specifically, encounter is used to describe “a meeting of adversaries, which at once pinpoints it as a form of contact or relation that has some element of antagonism or opposition at its heart” (Wilson, 2016; as cited in Wilson and Darling, 2016, 9-10). It also describes the

contact or meeting where “a lack of commonality is assumed or where some form of existing conflict, prejudice or unease is present” (Wilson, 2016, 454). However, Sara Ahmed (2000) explained that encounters “are more than unexpected, immediate, face-to-face interactions” (as cited in Leitner, 2012, 832); each encounter “reopens past encounters” (Ahmed, 2000, 8). In other words, the present encounters are constructed by past histories of encounters (Ahmed, 2004). For instance, Leitner’s study has shown that local residents’ encounters with immigrants in a small-town rural Minnesota are shaped by “the history of U.S. race relations and racial nationalism, as white residents draw on dominant pre-existing discourses of race and nation” (Leitner, 2012, 832). Moreover, some scholars have also illustrated that encounters are more than the meeting of different bodies; encounters also make difference (Ahmed, 2000; 2002; Houston, Wright, Ellis, Holloway and Hudson, 2005; Watson, 2006; Stevens, 2007; Askins and Pain, 2011; Anderson, 2014; Halvorsen, 2015; Wilson and Darling, 2016; and Wilson, 2016). Since the coming together and the negotiation of other bodies can never be fully predicted, despite being shaped by past histories of encounters, it can produce a possibility and potential of creating difference. Accordingly, both the old and current definition of encounter signifies the idea of opposition, difference and contradiction; it signifies the idea of past construction and the future possibility of differences. In addition, it also signifies the logic of ideas such as “us” and “them”, in-groups and out-groups, and the idea of prejudice (Rovisco, 2010).

Prejudice is a generalized attitude in which “people divide the world into in-groups and out-groups” (Valentine, 2010, 520). The word, prejudice, is derived from the Latin ‘*praejudicium*’, which means “a judgment based on previous decisions and experiences” (Allport, 1979, 6). Later, the term refers to “a judgment formed before due examination and

consideration of the facts” (Allport, 1979, 6). And, finally, it also refers to “emotional flavor of favorableness or unavailableness that accompanies such a prior and unsupported judgment” (Allport, 1979, 6). In brief, by combining three definitions in three periods of time, the definition of prejudice is “thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant” (Allport, 1979, 6). The phrase “thinking ill of others” is an expression that includes feelings of dislike, fear, and antipathy, such as “talking against people, discriminating against them or attacking them with violence” (Allport, 1979, 7); while the phrase “without sufficient warrant” means a judgment that lacks a factual basis. Additionally, the definition of negative prejudice has to include one additional ingredient, “functional significance” (Allport, 1979, 7). Negative attitudes are not prejudices “unless they serve a private, self-gratifying purpose for the person who has them” (Allport, 1979, 12). At present, based on the New English Dictionary, prejudice is recognized as positive and negative prejudice. It refers to “a feeling, favorable or unfavorable, toward a person or thing, prior to, or not based on, actual experience” (Allport, 1979, 6). To conclude, an encounter is a meeting where some conflict, unease, and favorable or unfavorable feelings towards out-group people is present. Mahachai or Samut Sakhon Province is a space supporting these encounters between migrant workers from Myanmar and the people from Thailand.

Currently, encounter refers to works broadly interested in understanding how people navigate social difference and diversity in everyday life (Valentine, 2008; Matejskova and Leitner, 2011; Wilson, 2011; Schuermans, 2013; and Wilson, 2016). Works focused on encounter generally relate to multi-cultural and multi-ethnic encounters (Amin, 2002; and Wilson, 2011; 2014), multi-class and multi-economic position encounters (Schuermans, 2013; Lawson and Elwood, 2014; and Darling and Wilson, 2016), and encounters across different

genders and religions (Hubbard, 2002; Valentine and Waite, 2010; and Middleton and Yarwood, 2015). Works on encounter have not only revealed the negotiations of different groups of people in places of meeting, but they have also examined ways to reduce prejudice and promote social integration by bringing different groups together. Numerous works on encounter have used “contact hypothesis” as an idea to create social integration (Bossard, 1932; Kennedy, 1943; Clark, 1952; Stephan and Stephan, 1985; Coleman and Haskey, 1986; Lieberman and Waters, 1988; Kalmijn and Flap, 2001; Hewstone, 2003; and Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008). The contact hypothesis was developed by Gordon Allport (1954) and has been widely used in social science disciplines. Allport argued that “people are uncomfortable with the unknown and so feel anxious about encounters with difference” (Allport, 1979; as cited in Valentine, 2008, 323), therefore, contact can reduce prejudice because “it lessens feelings of uncertainty and anxiety by producing a sense of knowledge or familiarity between strangers, which in turn generates a perception of predictability and control” (Allport, 1979; as cited in Valentine, 2008, 323-324).

Allport observed residential and occupational contact and concluded that these contacts could reduce prejudice between intergroups (Valentine, 2010). He claimed that contacts could create positive attitudes towards an individual member, and these positive attitudes can extend towards the entire group. Although some scholars would second Allport’s idea that contact can reduce prejudice (van Oudenhoven, Groenewoud and Hewstone, 1996; Hewstone, 1996; and Brown, Vivian and Hewstone, 1999), numerous researchers have critiqued that this positive prejudice arising from face-to-face contact only occurs towards an individual. It does not tend to scale up to the whole group (Valentine and McDonald, 2004; and Matejskova and Leitner, 2011). The work by Tatiana Matejskova and Halga Leitner (2011), for example, shows that the

immigration integration policies in Germany aimed at increasing contact between local German residents and Russian Aussiedlers failed to reduce prejudice. The immigration integration policies tried to bring individuals into regular contact with out-group people in non-threatening environments such as meeting in the streets, shops, and other public spaces. The policies attempted to reduce anxiety and make majority members more comfortable with minority members. However, the study found that interpersonal contact in these public spaces did not lead to scaling-up of positive attitudes towards the entire group (Matejskova and Leitner, 2011). Gill Valentine and Ian McDonald (2014) also seconded that positive encounters do not necessarily produce positive generalizations toward entire groups; conversely, negative experiences tend to create powerful negative prejudices against whole groups. Hence, contacts or encounters do not always reduce the boundaries between groups.

Developing from the idea of encounter, I see Mahachai as a borderland and a space of encounter. Different from other researchers, I not only explain how migrant workers from Myanmar and people from Thailand deal with social differences and diversities in the Mahachai area, but I also illustrate how this area became a significant space of encounter between these groups (in chapter three). I also analyze why certain negative/positive practices and feelings are created during encounters (in chapter four). Finally, I expand on how normal encounters cannot reliably reduce negative prejudices against an entire out-group. In the case of migrant workers from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon Province, normal encounters do not reliably help to reduce negative feelings and practices against migrant workers from Myanmar. This is because negative feelings and practices against migrant workers from Myanmar are continuously constructed through space, management of unease, and identities. However, this raises several questions.

What pattern of encounter can reliably reduce negative feelings and practices against the whole group? How can the boundary between migrant workers from Myanmar and people from Thailand be minimized? I answer these questions by examining the encounters in a micro-scale space of encounter, a workplace in the Mahachai area, to see if there are any specific encounters or events that can (temporary or permanently) reduce the boundaries among the workers in the workplace (in chapter five). Learning from the encounters in the workplace may lead to finding ways to reduce boundaries between migrant workers from Myanmar and the Thai people in Samut Sakhon Province.

### *Identities*

My research is also grounded in the idea of identity. The subject of identity was first extensively written by Erik Erikson in the 1940s. Erikson developed his theory of identity from Freud's psychosexual theory. However, he criticized how traditional psychoanalysis did not take the impact of social and cultural influences into account. Therefore, he used the idea of socio-cultural influences to extend his idea of identity (Erikson, 1963; 1968). His argument was that "identity constitutes an individual's synthesis of past experiences and perspectives, his/her ego competencies (i.e. *synthesizing* and *executive* functions), societal expectations, and future expectations" (as cited in Erdogan, 2002, 22).

He also explained that identity tends to cover four primary aspects: "a conscious sense of individual identity", "an unconscious striving for a continuity of personal character", "the silent doings of ego synthesis", and "an inner solidarity with a group's ideals and identity" (Erikson, 1959; as cited in Stevens, 2008, 62). All of these aspects

integrate to construct an identity representing “who people think they are” (Erdogan, 2002, 22). Richard Jenkins (2004) also demonstrated that identity is “a complex, flexible, and fluid construction that emerges through human interactions and is shaped by social context and the interests of individuals” (as cited in Ho and Bauder, 2012, 284). Therefore, identities encompass an inherited status or a state of being such as race or ethnicity, and also include conscious and unconscious personal identity, fostered by past experiences, individuals’ interests, political ideas, and societal and future expectations. Identities are, thus, developed through an individual’s relationship with his/her cultural context and with others. Moreover, identity can only be effectively asserted if the identity is recognized and responded to by others (Stevens, 2008). Accordingly, identity is never established as “an achievement but is dynamic and evolves during the course of a person’s lifetime both through direct experience of oneself and through being aware of the way others react to” (Stevens, 2008, 62).

### *3 Types of Identities and Performative Identity*

According to my theoretical and empirical research, identities frequently are summarized into three categories: the identity that one is, the identity that one thinks one is, and the identity other people think one is. First, the identity that one is includes inherited identities, social identities, and personal identities. Inherited identities are constructed through inheritance and legalization, such as ethnicity and citizenship. Even though these identities are not permanently fixed, they are very difficult to change. Shifting this type of identity often requires time and legalization. For example, citizenship includes legal status and cultural meanings associated with citizenship (Bauder, 2006). Therefore, to change citizenship, individuals need to formally

(legally) and informally (culturally and practically) change their identities. In doing so, the individual is required to follow the citizenship law of the desired country that he/she would like to gain citizenship. For example, some countries require an individual to live in the country for a certain amount of time, and some may require the individual to pass a language exam. However, there are also cases in which an individual buys citizenship through illegal means.

On the other hand, ethnic group is generally understood to designate a category of people which is largely biologically self-perpetuating, sharing fundamental cultural values and made up of a field of communication and interaction (Barth, 1969). Therefore, to change ethnicity, individuals are usually required to live in a new ethnic-environment for an extended period of time until he/she integrates into the new ethnic group. However, even though his/her ethnicity has changed, he/she sometimes cannot be a part of the new ethnic-group. These identities function as key mechanisms that make people vulnerable and exploitable. For example, in the case of migrant workers, both citizenship and ethnicity can render migrant workers vulnerable and more exploitable than non-migrants (Bauder, 2006).

Social identity refers to “the individual's awareness of the statuses and roles they occupy in a social structure in order to meet others’ expectations” (Erikson, 1968; as cited in Erdogan, 2002, 26). Henri Tajfel further explained that social identity is the identity of the individual “which derives from his/her membership in a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to this” (1982, 63; as cited in Erdogan, 2002, 26). Therefore, social identity contains two key elements: membership in a group or culture, and the value and emotion shared within a group. An individual can become a member of a group if at least one of his/her identities can connect to the social, cultural, linguistic, or economic structure of the

group. To be a part of the group, the individual has to accept the group identity and adopt the same culture, norms, values, or beliefs as other members of the group and act as a group member. For example, to integrate into the group of migrant workers from Myanmar in the furniture factory, individuals have to have at least one (or more) identities connected to the social identities of migrant workers from Myanmar. Also, the individual has to hold the same norms, values, or beliefs shared by the members of the group. Therefore, even among the migrant workers from Myanmar in the factory, there exists cliques or particular groups; only those who accept, at least to some degree, the group identity will be accepted as a member of that group.

Personal identity or self refers to “a person’s internalized behavioral repertoires” (Côté and Levine, 2002, 88). This identity can be seen as “general characteristics of the person, such as personality and physical appearance (personal self), or can be recognized when people are playing their social roles (social self)” (Levine, 2005; as cited in Erdogan, 2002, 24-25). In other words, personal identity includes physical characteristics and personal behavior, which is specifically performed in a specific context. Therefore, personal identities can be seen clearly when an individual interacts with others. During the encounter, each individual will evaluate one’s self across the encounter context and display the adhering versions of self. These personal identities differentiate himself/herself from others. Erikson called this process as “a continuous sense of one’s self across interactive contexts” (as cited in Erdogan, 2002, 27). Even though the three identities— inherited and legitimated identities, social identities, and personal identities— are differentiated, they are interrelated.

James Côté and Charles Levine demonstrated that the shift and development of identity is a concern with “who one is” and with “who one ought to be” (2002, 178). Previously, I have

already explained the idea of “who one is”; in this part, I will illustrate the second category of identity, the idea of “who one ought to be.” This category of identity includes ego identity. Ego identity is “the subjective/psychological dimension of identity” (Erdogan, 2002, 28). It refers to “the subjective sense of continuity which is a characteristic of the personality” (Erdogan, 2002, 28). Erikson explained ego identity as:

the awareness of the fact that there is a self-sameness and continuity to the ego’s synthesizing methods, the style of one’s individuality, and that this style coincides with the sameness and continuity of one’s meaning for significant others in the immediate community (1968, 50).

In other words, ego identity is an identity serving to protect individuals in the face of change. During a change, individuals will synthesize different selves into an identity throughout time. For example, a migrant worker from Myanmar coming to work in Thailand with a strong ego identity will more easily be able to synthesize himself/herself and integrate his/her previous self to the new environment. He/she may then acquire a coherent identity that might benefit him/her while living in Thailand. This new identity is not totally different from the previous one; rather, it is developed from the previous self. This identity still represents the sameness and continuity of the previous self. Ego identity also shows that identities can be developed, changed, or created to a better fit identity for integrating or adjusting self into an environment. Ego identity will produce an identity that is not totally different from the previous self.

However, this second type of identity is still limited because identity emerges through interactions (Jenkins, 2004; as cited in Ho and Bauder, 2012). Identity should be recognized

from both sides of an interaction, since some identities are not recognized by others. People who attempt to change their identity may not be accepted as a part of the group. Therefore, it is significant to consider the last category of identity, one's personal identity, as perceived by others. This identity refers to the way that other people perceive an individual. Without the group's acceptance, an individual's identity will not be recognized; his/her identities will be confined and unable to shift to the desired identity. This last category can link to the idea of "constitutive outside".

The constitutive outside is a relational process by which all identities are inscribed by the other they exclude (Derrida, 1981; and Hall, 1996). Even though identities are constituted through cultural pluralism and difference, both identities and difference are also constructed through the "Other". As Ernesto Laclau illustrated:

the reference to the other is very much present as constitutive of my own identity.

There is no way that a particular group living in a wider community can live a monadic existence—on the contrary, part of the definition of its own identity is the construction of a complex and elaborated system of relations with other groups (1995, 147).

Therefore, identities are not natural but a constructed form of closure (Laclau, 1990), or exclusion (Butler, 1993).

However, categorizing identities into diverse groups as Erikson and other researchers explained seems to be problematic in a performative approach. Performative scholars see that the three groups of identity are entangled. Rather than approaching identities as things (ethnicity,

gender, nationality, etc.), identity is a performative practice. Identity is a set of reiterative practices that naturally become a person's identity. Performative identity is developed from Judith Butler's idea of performativity. Butler refers to performativity as "the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (1993, 2). Butler connects her idea to the idea of the constitutive outside in which the body cannot exist outside of a cultural/social/historical construction. For Butler, "certain constructions appear constitutive, that is, have this character of being that "without which" we could not think at all" (1993, XI). To describe sexual identity, bodies only appear within "the productive constraints of certain highly gendered regulatory schemas" (1993, XI). When certain entities have been rendered desirable (such as being male or female), others have been constitutively constructed as undesirable. Gender does not function as a norm in society, but "is part of a regulatory process that produces the bodies it governs" (Butler, 1993, 1). Sex is, therefore, a performative practice; reiteration means repetition and change. Performativity can produce a gap "that unfolds the next moment allowing change to happen" (Dewsbury, 2000, 475). Performativity has the potentiality to create differences. Thus, the value of performativity is not only to make practices visible but also to offer "affectively positive alternatives to becomings" (Kaiser, 2014, 6). Therefore, performativity can sometimes fail to produce what it anticipates and opens up the possibility of change (Butler, 2010). Accordingly, based on the idea of performativity, the continuity of identity can be interrupted and identity can be changed through the changes of performative practice. For example, if the performative practices that are governing sex have changed, the sexual identity will be changed as well. Like gender identity, other identities can be changed if individuals realize that their identities are culturally constructed. As they are constructed through

their reiterative performances, their identity can be altered by changing their performative practice.

Drawing from the idea of identity, I see boundaries between people in the Mahachai area are constructed because people have different identities. It is not just one category of identities that play a role in creating boundaries; numerous identities interrelatedly play crucial roles in constructing boundaries in the space. Also, people's thoughts and reiterative practices construct their identities. Therefore, to deconstruct the boundaries, performative bordering practices (Kaiser, 2012; 2014) need to be reduced.

### **Outline of the dissertation**

The dissertation is divided into six chapters; each chapter deals with different stories about migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand. In chapter one, my intent has been to illustrate the background of this dissertation—how I developed the research topic, the ideas and the thesis statements. In chapter two, I give the readers additional background and basic stories about migrant workers from Myanmar, such as the policies on migrant workers in Thailand and statistical data on migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand. This chapter also includes an explanation of the methodology I used for this research. From chapter three to chapter five, I illustrate how and why migrant workers from Myanmar are constructed as Other (through space, through perspective and management of unease, and through identities), with each chapter illustrating particular ways of the construction of Othering. In chapter three, I explain the construction of Othering through space. I illustrate how Mahachai or Samut Sakhon Province has become the biggest Burmese community or a (dangerous) Burmese-ethnic niche in Thailand. In

chapter four, I demonstrate the ways the state actors view and manage migrant workers from Myanmar. In chapter five, I illustrate the ways migrant workers from Myanmar in a Mon-dominant factory are constructed by others and the way they construct others through the idea of identities. More specifically, I elaborate on the relationships and boundaries between the workers in the factories, including ways the workers use to reduce the boundaries in the factory. In the last chapter, I summarize my research and give some suggestions on how to reduce the boundaries between migrant workers from Myanmar and the Thai people in Samut Sakhon Province.

## **Chapter 2. How did I get to know them and their stories?**

As the most prosperous country in upper mainland Southeast Asia, Thailand attracts large numbers of migrants from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos (Labour Rights Promotion Network Foundation, 2011). Economic growth in Thailand over the past two decades has been relatively high, leading to increased economic activity and production, and also increased demand for large amounts of cheap labor for their production processes. Migrants from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos, thus, have become an important part of the labor force in Thailand. Additionally, many people from Thailand's neighboring countries have decided to move to and work in Thailand as a consequence of oppression and a lack of work opportunities in their own countries (Labour Rights Promotion Network Foundation, 2011). The economic environment in Thailand offers them better opportunities for employment. Even a job that pays below the official minimum wage is often much better paid than what they can obtain in their home countries (Labour Rights Promotion Network Foundation, 2011). Accordingly, in this chapter, I illustrate that, due to Thailand's economic situation and migrant worker policies, Thailand attracts numerous migrant workers from Myanmar to work in Samut Sakhon Province. Therefore, one of the most effective ways to get to know the migrant workers from Myanmar is to live and work with them in Samut Sakhon Province.

### **Thailand and migrant workers**

According to statistics from the Office of Work Permits, Ministry of Labour, there are 2.1 million documented migrant workers living in Thailand (Ministry of Labour, 2019). However, apart from those working officially, there are also many unregistered migrant workers living in

Thailand. Based on interviews with several Thai employers, unregistered migrant workers are mostly quietly accepted by Thai employers and local government officials and increasingly relied upon in the Thai economy. According to interviews with three employers in Samut Sakhon Province, Thai industries need migrant workers because of labor shortages in certain industries, primarily low-paid jobs. The working conditions in these industries no longer appeal to most Thai workers. The work is demanding, dirty, and sometimes dangerous; most Thai people do not want to do it. In response, many employers seek to hire migrant workers to avoid offering higher salaries needed to attract Thai workers to work in these sectors. Thus, they often look for ways to avoid abiding by Thailand's labor laws. By hiring migrant workers, the employers can pay less and provide fewer benefits than what ordinary Thai laborers require according to the law. Fish-processing, garment-manufacturing, furniture-making, and agriculture are examples of industries where such practices are common (Labour Rights Promotion Network Foundation, 2011).

Indicative of this, one report stated that "these industries have become dependent on foreign workers, and the workers' willingness to accept such conditions has helped Thailand maintain its competitiveness in these industries" (Labour Rights Promotion Network Foundation, 2011, 3).

Indeed, some migrants are lured into working in Thailand. They are brought into Thailand with promises of desirable work. After arriving in Thailand, however, many are coerced to work in the least-desired workplaces and are controlled by employers who confiscate their documents in order to keep them work in those workplaces (Labour Rights Promotion Network Foundation, 2011).

The majority of migrant workers in Thailand come from Myanmar. There are approximately 2.5 million workers from Myanmar in Thailand, which constitutes about 80

percent of the foreign workers in Thailand (Save the Children, 2014). Additionally, according to statistics from the Office of Work Permits, Ministry of Labour, about 1.2 million workers from Myanmar are documented (689,617 male workers and 510,497 female workers). Sixty percent of these workers live and work in Bangkok and Bangkok's perimeter, such as Samut Sakhon, Nakhon Pathom, and Nonthaburi (Ministry of Labour, 2019). Many of them also live in the provinces near the border between Thailand and Myanmar, or other industrial provinces in Thailand, such as Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, Chonburi, and Rayong.

Thailand is a destination for people from Myanmar to live and make money. Migrant workers from Myanmar primarily come to work in four different types of job in Thailand: work in the agricultural sector in northern Thailand, work in the fishery sector in southern and central Thailand, work in the industrial section in northern, western, eastern and central Thailand (Chamratrithirong, Holumyoung, and Apipornchaisakul, 2011), and work in the household sector throughout Thailand. These people from Myanmar are an important labor force in the Thai economy. However, although this migrant labor has been economically beneficial for Thailand, the majority of people in Thailand see workers from Myanmar as a threat and as enemies who have come to seize the country (see chapter four).

### **Samut Sakhon Province and migrant workers from Myanmar**

Apart from Bangkok, Samut Sakhon Province has the largest number of migrant workers from Myanmar. There are 169,230 documented workers from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon Province (87,872 male workers and 81,358 female workers) (Ministry of Labour, 2019). However, government officials and NGO officials estimate that there are about 400,000

undocumented and documented migrant workers from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon Province. This has resulted in Samut Sakhon Province becoming home to the largest migrant Burmese community in Thailand, excluding the Bangkok metropolitan area. These migrant workers from Myanmar work in diverse occupational sectors in Samut Sakhon Province, including the service sector, the agricultural sector, the fishery sector, the construction sector, the seafood production sector, and the household sector. According to statistics related to Foreign Workers Registration, Samut Sakhon's migrant workers from Myanmar mainly work in the seafood production sector (42%), the service sector (20%), and the agricultural sector (8%) (Ministry of Labour, 2016). Even though migrant workers from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon Province have different ethnicities and religions, records from the Ministry of Labour do not provide any statistical information about different ethnicities, native languages, or religions. Thai government statistics categorize migrant workers from Myanmar as Burmese regardless of migrant workers' ethnicity. This generalization can imply that the government lacks knowledge about the different ethnicities of people in Myanmar. It may also indicate the government's desire to categorize all migrant workers from Myanmar as Burmese, making it easier to construct an image of a dangerous enemy to migrants from Myanmar. Despite these generalizations, according to interviews with migrant workers from Myanmar and personal observations, many migrant workers from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon Province are Buddhist, and many of them are Karen, Mon, and Burmese.

### **Policies about migrant labor**

In order to support the national economy, the Thai government has been allowing migrant workers or foreigners to work in Thailand for many years. However, various Thai governments have also been concerned about national security; therefore, they have also restricted foreigners from working in particular areas and occupations. For instance, in recent history, several policies have been adopted to facilitate the control of migrant workers, including migrant workers from Myanmar. The table below and chapter four outline the changes in Thai government policies related to migrant workers over the past few decades.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Situation</b>	<b>Policies about migrant workers from Myanmar</b>
Before 1947	Thailand (or Siam) had not yet become a modern state. However, trading and international relationships between Siam and its neighbor states led some foreigners to come to the country.	Policies allowed foreigners to work in Siam. However, jobs for foreigners were restricted in order to reserve some jobs for Thai people (National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, 2011).
1947	Thailand was ruled by a military government. Under the nationalist view of its leaders, the government thought that foreigners might be a threat to national security.	Policies were launched to increase alien taxes and forbid foreigners to work as unskilled laborers (National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, 2011)

1959	<p>The revolutionary council of Sarit Thanarat decided that the laws and policies relating to foreigners were not appropriate for the national economy. Therefore, there was an amendment of the laws which was completed in 1972.</p>	<p>The revolutionary proclamations of 1972 allowed foreigners to work in Thailand. The jobs that foreigners could work at were jobs that were beneficial to Thailand. Foreigners were required to have skills and knowledge in order to work in these positions. Moreover, foreigners who had been working and living in Thailand for a long period would receive a permanent work permit (National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, 2011).</p>
1978	<p>For balancing national economy and national security, there were stricter and clearer rules to control foreign laborers who wanted to work in Thailand.</p>	<p>Foreigners were only given access to four types of work permits:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Temporary work permits</li> <li>2. Work permits for investment</li> <li>3. Work permits for exiled people</li> <li>4. Permanent work permits for foreign migrants who had been working in Thailand before the revolutionary proclamations</li> </ol>

1988-1993	<p>Millions of workers fled from Myanmar to Thailand due to long-term problems in their home country, such as political conflicts, a poor economy, and a lack of educational opportunities and jobs (Save the Children, 2014). These problems began when the military took over in 1962 (Adkins, Kangwantam, Kongsawatvoragul, Newman, Sikamahn, Thomas, and Yuvacharaskul, 2015). The military's rules "suppressed Burmese dissent, forcibly relocated civilians, poorly managed economic collapse, and targeted ethnic minorities" (BBC News, 2014, as cited in Adkins et al., 2015, 5). Since 1962, the Burma Socialist Program Party headed by General Ne Win ruled the country as</p>	<p>The Thai government recognized migrants from Myanmar as persons fleeing from fighting and permitted them to enter "temporary shelters" (International Organization for Migration, 2013, as cited in Adkins et al., 2015). However, although the Thai state would support these people from Myanmar to temporarily live in Thailand in providing shelters, some of the migrants decided to stay permanently and raise their families in Thailand (Adkins et al., 2015). In 1993, policies allowed foreigners to work as unskilled laborers for the first time, but they were only allowed to work in the fishery section and construction section in specific areas such as in Samut Sakhon Province (National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, 2011).</p>

<p>a one-party state. Under the vision of socialism, the military government created the Burmese Way to Socialism, which involved economic isolation and military strengthening. These political shifts made Myanmar one of the most impoverished countries in the world (Burma Watcher, 1989; Tallentire, 2007; and Woodsome, 2009).</p> <p>Consequently, a series of nationwide protests known as the 8888 Uprising, or the People Power Uprising in Myanmar, began (Yawnghwe, 1995; as cited in Alagappa, 1995).</p> <p>Primarily organized by university students in Rangoon, the 8888 uprising was started on August 8, 1988.</p> <p>Monks, children, students, housewives, doctors, and other</p>	<p>Moreover, an Act was established to prohibit foreigners from working in jobs such as craftsmen, farm laborers, drivers, construction laborers, etc. (Council of Ministers of Thailand, 1993)</p>
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	<p>ordinary people united throughout the country and protested against the government (Steinberg, 2002). After a bloody military coup, thousands of people were killed, and the uprising ended on August 18, 1988 (Ferrara, 2003; Fogarty, 2008; and Wintle, 2007). As a consequence of the uprising in Myanmar, numerous people fled from Myanmar to Thailand to seek political asylum and work. Moreover, in 1993 the economic situation in Thailand required numerous low-wage laborers, especially in the construction and fishery sectors (Archavanitkul, 2008).</p>	
1996-2000	<p>Due to the significant number of migrant workers, the Thai government wanted to control the number of migrant workers, the jobs</p>	<p>The government organized periodic campaigns in which undocumented migrants from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos who were working in</p>

	<p>that migrant workers could apply for, and reduce the number of undocumented migrants (Archavanitkul, 2008).</p>	<p>Thailand could register and apply for a work permit without penalty.</p> <p>Additionally, the undocumented migrant workers from Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia could temporarily work in Thailand. However, they were limited to work in some sectors and some provinces, such as Samut Sakhon Province (Archavanitkul, 2008).</p>
2001-2003	<p>The policies for migrant workers were significantly changed when Thaksin Shinawatra became prime minister of Thailand (Archavanitkul, 2008). According to his policies, migrant workers were increasingly allowed to work in Thailand.</p>	<p>Registration was allowed in all provinces and all industries. A total of 586,000 workers were registered in 2002 (Archavanitkul, 2008).</p>
2004-2013	<p>The goal of the government was to encourage all undocumented migrant workers to become documented</p>	<p>The government allowed migrant laborers' spouses to register.</p> <p>Moreover, in 2006, the government signed memoranda of understandings with the Cambodian, Lao and Burmese</p>

	migrant workers (Archavanitkul, 2008).	governments, which allowed two-year contracts for workers (Labour Rights Promotion Network Foundation, 2011).  Workers who can prove that they are from any of these three countries can receive two-year work permits.
After the 2014 coup to present	The government wanted to reduce the number of undocumented workers and reduce human trafficking problems.	The government provided one stop service centers <sup>2</sup> for migrant workers to register and for employers to make work permits for their workers. In 2017, the government launched policies that included severe punishment for undocumented migrant workers and employers who hired undocumented workers.

*Figure 3: The changes in Thai government policies related to migrant workers over the past few decades*

Although these policies and restrictions would classify some migrant workers from Myanmar as illegal workers in Thailand, illegal workers can apply for a work permit and work legally in

<sup>2</sup> One-stop service centers are organized by Foreign Workers Administration Office. One-stop service centers allow all migrant workers from Myanmar to come and apply for visa and work permit without going back to Myanmar or coming to Bangkok. In 2018, there are 80 one-stop service centers in Thailand.

the country. At present, there are four ways for migrant workers from Myanmar to receive a work permit in Thailand, as follows (National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, 2011; and Ministry of Labour, 2009):

1. Migrant workers who are living in Thailand have to prove their identity to receive work permits. They must have passports or certificates of identity to apply for work permits.
2. Workers who have been exiled from Myanmar and have received permission to temporarily stay in Thailand are allowed to work in Thailand.
3. Migrant workers from Myanmar who have immigration documents and have permission to work in a certain job (jobs that require those workers) can work in Thailand for a certain period of time. However, the work will be constrained only to areas adjacent to their domicile in Myanmar.
4. Workers from Myanmar who want to come work in Thailand can register for work through the process of entering via an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding)<sup>3</sup>.

Thai economic situations and Thai policies have allowed migrant workers from Myanmar to legally come to work as unskilled laborers in Samut Sakhon Province since 1993. This is a factor

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Memorandum of Understanding, Thai employers have to apply for quotas and submit a demand letter for employment at the Provincial Employment office to hire foreign workers to work in Thailand. After that, the Ministry of Labor of Thailand will send the documents to the Ministry of Labor of Myanmar. Once the documents are approved by the Ministry of Labor of Myanmar. The local offices of the Department of Labor of Myanmar will announce the recruitment of workers. The approved workers have to come meet the Thai employers at the National Verification Center located in Thailand (Mae Sai, Mae Sot and Ranong) for a job interview. If the workers are selected by the employers, the employers will travel (or send someone) to pick up the workers at the Temporary Passport Office in Myawaddy, Tachileik or Koh Song and assist the workers in the immigration process. The workers must also apply for a two-year visa and a work permit in order to stay and work in Thailand.

that has made Samut Sakhon Province the biggest Burmese community in Thailand (see other factors in chapter three).

### **How I got to know migrant workers from Myanmar**

Since there are numerous migrant workers from Myanmar living and working in Samut Sakhon Province, I decided to live in Samut Sakhon Province in order to get to know them. However, as an ethnically Chinese-Thai<sup>4</sup> female student born in Thailand, I predicted that doing research on migrant workers from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon Province would not be easy. As mentioned earlier, I was conditioned to believe that migrant workers from Myanmar were dangerous and that the Mahachai area in Samut Sakhon Province was a dangerous place to stay; therefore, to work and live there, I believed that I had to be careful. Moreover, since I do not come from Myanmar and my skin color is whiter than most migrant workers from Myanmar, I feared that migrant workers from Myanmar would not be comfortable interacting with me. In the end, I decided to work in a factory to be in close proximity to the migrant workers from Myanmar. Living and working in Samut Sakhon Province among the migrant workers from Myanmar was, therefore, my strategy to get to know and understand them better.

In the following section, I explain the methods I used for my research. I utilized four principal qualitative research methods for my research: participant observation, autoethnography,

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<sup>4</sup> I identify myself as an ethnically Chinese-Thai rather than a Thai because my grandparents are Chinese and my skin color is whiter than many Thai people. Accordingly, some of my participants might look at me as a Sino-Thai and this might affect the way they look at me. Even if I see myself as a Thai, some Thai participants might not perceive me as a Thai or as a part of their group since identities are also constructed by the constitutive outside.

archival research and semi-structured interviews. Additionally, I also reveal some difficulties and limitations I experienced during the field work.

### **Preparing for fieldwork**

Before conducting fieldwork, good preparation is required. According to Crang and Cook (2007), an important first step for ethnographic research is developing early contacts in the area in which the research will be conducted. As they put it, one needs to “find out what research may be possible within the constraints of access, time, mobility, and money available for ‘fieldwork’” (2007, 17-18). To prepare for my fieldwork in 2017-2018, I studied the Burmese language for a year and a half. Learning the Burmese language significantly supported my ability to connect with migrant workers from Myanmar when I was doing my fieldwork in 2017-2018.

Additionally, I engaged in pre-dissertation fieldwork in 2016. I went to the Mahachai area and contacted the NGO, the Labor Rights Promotion Network Foundation. Moreover, I contacted the director of the Myanmar Mingalar Center, a Burmese community in the Mahachai. I lived in the area for approximately two months from June 2016 to July 2016. However, after conducting the pre-dissertation fieldwork, I realized that it was difficult to meet migrant workers from Myanmar since they worked six days a week, and they only had one day free for me to talk with them.

I realized that the best way to understand and receive information from them would be to work with them. I received this idea from Boonlert, an anthropologist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Thammasat University, who researched homeless people in the

Philippines. He told me that in order to get to understand homeless people, one must become a homeless person. Similarly, in order to understand migrant workers, I decided to work in their environment, leading to my search for factory or warehouse jobs within Samut Sakhon Province.

While there were many available jobs listed online, many of them were office jobs. As these opportunities did not fit my requirements, I gave up on trying to find a job beforehand and decided that I would have to find work immediately after moving into the area. When calling my mother to explain, she mentioned that my distant cousins were working in a factory alongside many migrant workers from Myanmar. While I initially reached out to my cousins requesting work, I did not receive a promising response. My cousins had not approached their employer out of fear due to differences in social class. Despite the seemingly lack of work opportunities, I remained confident. If necessary, I could approach the employer myself while utilizing the family connection. Thus, before conducting fieldwork from 2017-2018, I had already established a familiarity with the area, as well as a social network that could lead me to job opportunities in close proximity to migrant workers from Myanmar.

Crang and Cook also explained that to undertake qualitative research, “it is necessary to have a critical, conceptual, geographical understanding of the subjectivity of researchers and researched, and the groups (e.g. ‘cultures’) they may be seen to be part of” (2007, 32). Before conducting fieldwork, I tried to consider my own subjectivity. I found that as a Chinese-Thai researcher who had been taught in the Thai education system, I had the view that people from Myanmar were dangerous. At the same time, I also agreed that workers from Myanmar should receive the same rights as Thai workers. Thai employers and Thai government officials should

not exploit the workers from Myanmar. These were my subjectivities, which I accepted would affect the way I did research. In terms of the subjectivities of the researched, I had a partial understanding of the thoughts of workers from Myanmar. This information was from my pre-dissertation fieldwork. I also partially understood the Mahachai people's and the Mahachai government officials' perspectives on the workers from Myanmar. Even though the information received from the pre-dissertation fieldwork was not conclusive, it provided a solid foundation for me to expand on in my fieldwork in 2017-2018.

### **Participant observation and autoethnography**

Participant observation developed out of “a concern to understand the world-views and ways of life of actual people in the contexts of their everyday lived experiences” (Crang and Cook, 2007, 37). It is a method of collecting data that comes from the relationships between people, patterns, and events (Jorgensen, 1989). It is appropriate for researchers who are concerned with “human meanings and interactions viewed from the insiders' perspectives,” and “who are interested in the foundation of inquiry of the everyday life of the subjects” (Jorgensen, 1989, 13). Local people may obscure and conceal their feelings (Goffman, 1959; and Douglas, 1976) when they know that they are being studied. Therefore, participant observation is a useful method to gain information that is not replicable through other research methods.

Additionally, participant observation requires the researcher to become “directly involved as a participant in people's daily lives” (Jorgensen, 1989, 20); thus, the researcher can experience the research subjects' meanings and feelings from the role of an insider. The role of a participant observer is to find out what happens in the group (Friedrichs and Ludtke, 1975). Participant

observation is crucial for my research, as it is my principal methodology when addressing my research questions because it provides an understanding of migrant workers' daily life and the boundaries among the workers in the factories.

When conducting research, I integrated participant observation with autoethnography. Autoethnography refers to the use of the author's self-reflection and writing to analyze people's lives. There are different uses of autoethnography (Foster, McAllister, and Brien, 2006). Autoethnography can range from research about the culture of a group in which the researcher is a member (Hayano, 1978), about "the personal experiences of a research process to a parallel exploration of the researcher's and the participants' experiences", and "about the experience of the researcher while conducting a specific piece of research" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; and Maso, 2001, as cited in Méndez, 2003, 281). In this project, I used my self-reflection with participant observation to describe and critique the workers' beliefs and the belief of people from Thailand. I wrote my feelings and experiences down while I was doing the fieldwork; I used my reactions to analyze the performances of the people from Myanmar and workers from Thailand.

#### *Working, creating networks and becoming their friend*

To understand the feelings and experiences of migrant workers from Myanmar, I used participant observation by working with migrant workers. I started doing participant observation, including autoethnography, in July 2017. I stayed in Samut Sakhon Province from July 2017 to May 2018; however, I only worked for four months. I worked in a furniture factory from August to September 2017 and throughout December 2017, and a textile factory in January 2018. During the months I lived in Samut Sakhon Province and was not working, I tried to contact local people

and local officials for interviews. I also continued to meet migrant workers from Myanmar almost every weekend. Participant observation is, thus, the primary method I used. With this in-depth ethnography, I received information from direct experiences and stories told by migrant workers from Myanmar, workers from Thailand, and some Samut Sakhon locals. More significantly, with this in-depth ethnography, I became friends with many migrant workers; the migrant workers from Myanmar felt more comfortable disclosing their stories to me after I lived and worked with them.

Before going to work in the factory, I contacted the owner of the factory and was able to schedule a meeting. I described the basis of my research and my desire to work with migrant workers in his factory. It turned out that he was also a distant relative. He was pleasant, and he said that it would not be any problem to work with him. Due to family connections, and my decision to not receive pay, it was not difficult to get a position within the factory. I had no problem with non-paid work because I knew factory work was low quality, and I did not want other employees to feel that I took the job opportunity from someone else. I went to meet him at his factory in July 2017. His factory is a legally-organized furniture factory in Samut Sakhon Province. It is located in the Ban Phaeo District, which is a 15-20-minute drive from the center of Samut Sakhon Province. However, the factory is not on the main road; therefore, there is no public transportation to the factory. Many workers in the factory came to the factory by buses arranged by the factory's owner as most of the workers lived in the same area; however, those workers had to pay 500 baht (around 16 dollars) per month for the bus fee. Workers who lived in other areas would find their own means of transportation in order to reach the factory. Only Thai workers came to the factory by car.

In the factory, there were around 500 workers. Around 400 of them were migrant workers from Myanmar, and the other 100 were from Thailand. The migrant workers from Myanmar included Mon and Burmese. Even though they had different ethnicities, they were all Buddhists. The workers from Thailand mostly were Samut Sakhon locals (including Thai people, Chinese-Thai people, and Mon-Thai people who were born in Samut Sakhon Province) and ethnically Lao people from northeastern Thailand. Around 65 percent of the workers were female.

After arriving at the factory, the factory owner and I met in private while the factory workers were in the warehouse. He introduced me to the manager of the factory, who also turned out to be one of my distant relatives. The owner and the manager proceeded to explain the work hours and work divisions within the factory. Work hours were from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., and from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Sometimes, the workers had to work overtime from 5.30 p.m. to around 9:00 p.m. or 10:00 p.m. Work in the factory is split into two primary departments: office work and warehouse work. Warehouse work is further divided into separate departments for specialized processes such as packing, sanding, cutting, etc. Thus, work responsibilities and duties are dependent on which department a worker is assigned. However, all migrant workers, excluding the janitor, work in the warehouse, while all of the office workers are Thai. Workers in the office receive a higher salary than the workers in the warehouse. Although Thai workers and migrant workers from Myanmar may technically receive the same salary if working in the same position, migrant workers are systematically restricted from receiving better job opportunities. Often, migrant workers from Myanmar are confined to warehouse work.

The owner and manager also asked me where I wanted to stay. I told them that I wanted to stay in the same apartment with migrant workers from Myanmar. Therefore, they contacted the owner of the apartment for me. However, unfortunately, the apartment that the workers were staying in was full as I had contacted them in July 2017, and I would start working in August 2017. Before leaving the factory, the manager of the factory gave me three uniforms. The uniform was a blue T-shirt. She told me to wear them with long pants. After leaving the factory, I spent two to three hours looking for apartments, most of which were full. There was only one apartment that had rooms available for me so I decided to move in there. The apartment was about a 10-minute drive to the factory.

I started working in the factory on August 1st, 2017. Apart from the factory owner, the factory manager, and my cousins, no one knew who I was. None of the migrant workers from Myanmar knew that the owner of the factory was my relative. Therefore, when the workers in the factory asked me who I was, I created a new identity for myself. I told them that I was a student who was studying the factory, Burmese people, and Burmese culture. At that time, I did not lie to them, although I did not reveal my entire position. I told them that I had cousins working in the factory, and that is why I could get the job, but I did not tell them that the owner of the factory is also my cousin. However, I told them the truth when we became close friends. Therefore, at the end of my work, some of them knew that I was a relative of the factory owner. However, this did not affect the way they interacted with me because we had already become close friends.

I worked in the warehouse at the furniture factory for three months. In order to meet many workers and to understand the nature of each department, I moved to work in several departments such as the Sanding Department, Packing Department, Cutting Department, and Composition Department. As I mentioned, different departments require different kinds of responsibilities. Therefore, I did various kinds of work in the factory, such as sanding wood, composing picture frames, and packing furniture. Similar to the workers, I had to work from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and from Monday to Saturday. Somedays, I worked overtime until 8:00 p.m. or 9:00 p.m. While working, typically, we could either sit or stand. We could only go to the restroom for a few minutes, we could not have food, and we could not talk. If workers talked to each other and the head of the department saw them, they were scolded. However, before I started working in the factory, the factory owner had told the heads of each department and the factory workers that there would be a student coming to study the factory and its workers. Therefore, if that student asked them questions, they were free to respond. Accordingly, I could talk to other workers while working in the factory, and the workers could talk to me. At first, only a few workers (often those in close proximity) were bold enough to converse with me. Most of the workers, at that time, were unfamiliar with me and were afraid of being scolded by their department heads if they responded to me. However, after seeing other workers talking to me without being criticized, many soon conversed with me without fear. Consequently, I gained a lot of information by talking with them while working.

In addition to working in the furniture factory, I also worked in a textile factory in the Muang District of Samut Sakhon Province for one month (January 2018). I was able to work in this factory because the factory owner was my friend's friend. Having finished my work in the

furniture factory, I moved to live in another apartment in the Muang District of Samut Sakhon Province. I lived there for ten months. I still had to drive to the textile factory, however, since there was no public transportation to the factory. Even though the factory is located in the Muang District, it is far from the center of the Muang District.

While a taxi could be taken from my apartment to the factory, it would be difficult to find a taxi to take me back home. I, thus, had to drive to the factory. In the factory, there were around 100 workers and the majority of the workers were Karen. Most of the workers lived in the factory and they rarely went outside the factory's area. The workers in the textile factory had to work from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. However, most of them worked overtime until 10:00 p.m. In this factory, I worked as a clerk's assistant. I helped Noi, a Karen worker, do her work. This Karen worker could speak Thai very well, and she was the one who took care of the migrant workers from Myanmar in the factory. Therefore, I received a lot of information from her. However, I could not talk with other workers in the textile factory while working because of the noise from the machines. I could only talk to them during lunch time. Unfortunately, most of them went back to have lunch in their rooms. Hence, apart from the information I gained from Noi, I did not receive much rich information from working in this factory.

The information I received from my participant observation research consisted of stories about the workers' backgrounds and their experiences in Myanmar and Thailand, including their daily lives and feelings. The information also focused on experiences with other workers, employers, government officials, police, and immigration officials. Moreover, while working in the factory, I gained information about the relationships between the workers within the factory

environment. I saw how they interacted and talked to other workers, as well as how they performed in different situations. However, since I could not take notes or record the information while working in the factory, I spent one to two hours every night recording all of the information I had received into my laptop. The information I typed down included all the interactions that happened during the day, the stories the migrant workers told me, my everyday experiences, and my self-reflection on each occurrence. With the information I gained from participant observation and autoethnography, I can partially answer my research questions.

#### *Follow-up fieldwork*

I came back to Samut Sakhon Province to do some follow-up fieldwork in June to July 2019. However, at this time, I did not reenter the factory environment but instead visited the migrant worker's apartments to meet and interact with the workers. I usually stayed there and went to the temple and the market with them on Sunday. Through this research I gained some statistical information about the workers in the factory that I missed from my last participant observation. This included new information about their lives after I left Samut Sakhon Province.

#### *Limitations and difficulties*

Although participant observation in the factory would provide me with valuable information, several difficulties affected my data collection. First, as stated before, I was unable to find a living space that was shared with migrant workers from Myanmar. Staying in the same apartment with migrant workers from Myanmar would have allowed me to observe them outside of a working context. To partially solve this problem, I decided to spend Sundays with migrant workers from Myanmar. Every Sunday, I would visit an apartment that my friends from

Myanmar were living in. In the mornings, we would eat breakfast and afterwards we went to the market or temple together. I would return home in the evening. Using this method, I could, at least, observe how migrant workers lived on Sundays.

Transportation was another limitation I experienced. As stated before, there was no public transportation to the workplaces apart from the buses organized by the factory. Moreover, due to my inability to ride a motorcycle, I had to travel to the factory by car. Going to the factory by car might have affected the way the workers in the factory perceived me. Although some Thai workers used cars for transportation, most of the workers came to the factory either by organized buses or motorcycle. Due to driving a car to work, some workers might have seen me as a high social class Thai worker who was separate from the majority of the factory workers.

Another limitation of this participant observation was my physical health. As it was my first time working in a factory warehouse, the work was very challenging for me. Inside the warehouse, it was very hot and humid; also, it was very noisy. When I came out of the warehouse, my ears would often be ringing. Furthermore, standing/sitting and working for a whole day was challenging as it led to either back pain or leg pain or both. Consequently, I decided to work for only a few months in the furniture factory and one month in the textile factory.

However, I was not the only worker experiencing physical discomfort. Migrant workers from Myanmar also experienced similar problems when they first came to work in the factory. Due to their many years of labor, their bodies had grown accustomed to the physical exertion.

Nevertheless, physical distress became a useful conversation topic for me to connect with the workers in the factory due to the shared experience of suffering.

Another limitation was that my identity, positionality, and subjectivity affected the way the workers viewed me and the way I viewed the workers. On the one hand, my subjects, mainly migrant workers from Myanmar, viewed me differently from the normal factory workers since I am Chinese-Thai who has white skin according to their perspective. At that time, I thought they referred to my genetic skin color; however, it actually referred to my social class. In the Southeast Asians' view, white and black do not denote race or genetic appearance; they refer to wealth and privilege (High, 2004). White skin is associated with money and urban lifestyles; black skin, meanwhile, is associated with poverty and rural lifestyles (High, 2004). The workers in the factory saw my white skin color, therefore, they thought that I was wealthy and should not come to work in the warehouse. They thought that I should work in the office. Accordingly, I was an absolute outsider to the factory workers' community and this initially created a barrier between me and my subjects. No one talked to me when I first presented myself there. However, this limitation was partially solved by my Burmese language skill. Although I was never fully considered an insider—an actual unskilled worker—using their language helped me to befriend the workers. As Watson (2004) explained, the use of language can help to build rapport and trust between the researcher and the researched. Therefore, after I tried to talk to my subjects in Burmese, they felt more comfortable to talk with me.

Another significant drawback for participant observation was my position as a Thai researcher. Migrant workers, therefore, would not fully trust and befriend me. They might not

provide the truth. To solve this problem, I did not try to be an insider or reveal myself as a researcher. Instead, I portrayed myself as a student studying the Burmese language and learning about work in the factory. With this position, migrant workers trusted me more than having a position as a researcher because being a student has less impact on their life than being a researcher. Since they knew that I was studying Burmese, many migrant workers tried to teach me Burmese and the work in the factory. Their position as my Burmese teachers developed into friendships. Eventually, I disclosed my real position as a Thai student and researcher to the migrant workers after we became friends.

Yet another limitation is that my background differs from my subjects' background, hence my understanding of their cultures and customs was limited. To solve this problem, Friedrichs and Ludtke (1975) suggested that the researcher should find some individuals who can accept and trust him/her, which can then lead to others in the same community trusting him/her as well. Accordingly, I built up connections with people who trusted me, such as Wah Kiang and Noi, two migrant workers from Myanmar in the furniture and textile factories. They became my key informants and helped me develop connections with other workers in the factories.

Subjectivity affected the way I viewed the workers and the way I produced knowledge. Subjectivities are feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and desires that comprise an individual's identity (Crang and Cook, 2007), which are formed by "people experience and act in the world at multiple points, times and places" (Crang and Cook, 2007, 9). Although I am ethnically Chinese, I was raised in Thai society and studied in Thai schools with numerous other ethnic Chinese. Therefore, I have never been treated as an Other in Thai society, and I have always viewed

myself as Thai. My subjectivity, at that time, was formed by Thai education and the media. Therefore, similar to most Thai people, I viewed people from Myanmar as national enemies and dangerous people. However, subjectivity is always fluctuating (Crang and Cook, 2007). After studying in higher education, my subjectivity changed. I viewed migrant workers from Myanmar as workers who are entitled to equal rights and treatment as Thai workers. However, I still had a perception that people from Myanmar are dangerous because of Thai media and social media in Thailand always showing negative images of people from Myanmar. I could not conduct research without these subjectivities, and they affected the ways I conducted my fieldwork.

I was aware of these subjectivities when I was doing my research, as I took a qualitative methods course at UW-Madison before I started my research. Although some researchers might feel that subjectivities are obstacles to research, I found that subjectivities could be used in order to understand the subjects of a study (Rennie, 1994; Schneider, 1999). To deal with my subjectivities, I wrote down my feelings, my bias, and what situations made me feel that way. I always questioned how my knowledge changed and what situations caused the changes. Also, I investigated how my knowledge had been constructed with an awareness of reflexivity.

Moreover, I had to cope with the subjectivity of my research subjects as well. The environment and background of those researched always influence their knowledge and viewpoints. To deal with the research subjects' subjectivity, I studied the roots of their subjectivity. I tried to answer what contexts and backgrounds created their subjectivities. Through awareness and analyses of research subjects' subjectivities and my own, subjectivity is much less of a problem and more a resource for understanding (Crang and Cook, 2007).

### **Archival research and secondary sources collection**

To address my central question in chapter four and gain background information on the issue of the management of the state on migrant workers, I collected primary and secondary sources beginning in May 2017. Archival research is the use of primary sources to do the research. These sources include statistical records of Burmese immigration collected by the Office of Foreign Workers Administration and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Samut Sakhon Provincial Administrative Organization, and the Ministry of Labor, Thailand, such as immigration policy documents published by the Thai government and information about migrant workers from Myanmar presented by public media and via social media. When conducting research, I first went to the Office of Foreign Workers Administration and Ministry of Foreign Affairs to study the history of Burmese migration in the Mahachai area. However, the information I received was mainly about refugees from Myanmar in Thailand and there was no information about workers in Samut Sakhon Province. Therefore, I contacted the Ministry of Labor for Thailand and asked for statistical documents and reports on migrant workers from Myanmar. Also, I went to Samut Sakhon Provincial Administrative Organization to find some documents about the history of Mahachai and the history of migrant workers in the Mahachai area. I received some information and documents from them. Additionally, I researched on labor regulation and immigration policy, including information on public and social media, in order to answer my central research question, “How are migrant workers from Myanmar viewed and imagined by the managers of unease or state actors in Thailand?”

## **Semi-structured interviews**

An interview is “a technique designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participant’s perspective on the research topic” (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest and Namey, 2005, 29). It is motivated by “the desire to learn everything the participant can share about the research topic” (Mack et al., 29). Holstein and Gubrium identified an interview as being “a way of generating empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives” (1997, 113). Bridget Byrne said that “it is an effective way of accessing individuals’ attitudes that cannot be observed in a formal questionnaire” (2004, 182). In the interviews, the researcher is considered a student, while the interviewee is considered an expert. Researchers engage with the interviewees by posing questions, listening to the responses attentively, and asking follow-up questions (Mack et al., 2005). The interview, thus, is a dialogue rather than an interrogation (Flowerdew and Martin, 2005).

The advantage of the interview is that it allows the interviewees “to construct their own accounts of their experiences by describing and explaining their lives in their own words” (Flowerdew and Martin, 2005, 111). Moreover, it offers opportunities for the researcher and the researched to explain the contradictions and complexities of issues. Indeed, interviews are a crucial technique in order to understand how migrant workers from Myanmar are treated in real life. This research used semi-structured interviews to gather insightful experiences and information from migrant workers from Myanmar, people in Samut Sakhon Province, police and immigration officials, and local government officials.

*Interviews with Thai government officials in Bangkok and Mahachai*

To gather information for my fourth chapter, I conducted interviews with Thai government officials. Semi-structured interviews with several Thai government officials were conducted from March to August 2018. In order to interview government officials, a recommendation letter produced by my institution was required. As a student funded by the Royal Thai Government and a lecturer at Chulalongkorn University, I could ask for the recommendation letter from Chulalongkorn University. Therefore, it was not difficult for me to receive a recommendation letter and to contact and interview government officials. I contacted the chair of Samut Sakhon Provincial Labor Office, a member of the Provincial Council, Samut Sakhon Province, the director of a criminal investigation section of Samut Sakhon Province, and the director of the immigration office of Samut Sakhon Province. The interviews focused on the policies and practices that were used to manage migrant workers from Myanmar, including their thoughts and feelings about migrant workers from Myanmar. With the document provided by the university and my position as a lecturer at Chulalongkorn University, the government officials were willing to answer my questions.

Before starting every interview with the officials, I introduced myself and the purpose of my project to the interviewees. I also asked them for permission to audio record each interview. I recorded the interviews using an audio recorder (if the interviewees allowed me to do it) and by taking notes. My notes included both the information provided by the interviewees and information about their body language as body language may reflect separate feelings and ideas. After the interviews, I also asked for their phone numbers in case I had further questions to ask.

*Interviews with the Thai people in Samut Sakhon Province*

I interviewed Thai workers and employers within the Mahachai area and from other parts of Thailand. The interviews were mostly conducted around December 2017 to May 2018. The topics of the interviews included their backgrounds, their identity, their feelings about workers from Myanmar in Mahachai, and their relationship with migrant workers from Myanmar. The interviews were conducted in places where the interviewees felt most comfortable, and they were conducted in the Thai language.

Similar to the way I conducted the interviews with government officials, before starting the interview, I introduced myself to the interviewees and discussed my project. I also made it clear to the interviewees that their names would not be exposed and that the interview could be stopped at any time if they experienced discomfort. I also asked them for permission to record the audio during the interviews, and I took notes while interviewing.

#### *Interviews with migrant workers from Myanmar*

Apart from informal interviews I conducted during my participant observation in the factories, I also did semi-structured interviews with the workers from Myanmar from December 2017 to August 2018. I conducted these semi-structured interviews after I had done participant observation in the factory. Having done participant observation, I had better connections with the people from Myanmar and Thai people in Samut Sakhon Province and better understood their circumstances, which helped me to conduct more productive interviews.

The interviewees were migrant workers from Myanmar (mainly from Karen state, Mon state, and Dawei) in Mahachai. To answer how the migrant workers are treated and managed by

the Thai government, I let them tell stories about their experiences with the central government and the local Mahachai government officials. Furthermore, to address the research question in chapter three, I interviewed undocumented migrants to see how they evade the state's power and the local government's checking.

In the interviews, I asked them about their histories. Why and how did they come to Mahachai? How did they know about the Mahachai area? How did they experience the Mahachai area? What difficulties did they experience when they first arrived in the Mahachai area? I believe that learning about their backgrounds and biography will help me better understand their lives in the Mahachai. I asked them about their ordinary life, working life, leisurely activities, as well as their opinions on how to improve their lives or how to encourage other people to treat them better. These interviews were semi-structured, so the questions were flexible. I saw them as experts on the issue and did not guide them to answer. All of the interviewees could speak Thai and Burmese, although most of them were not ethnic Burmese. Accordingly, the interviews were conducted in Thai and some were conducted in Burmese with my friend, a Mon worker in Samut Sakhon Province.

The interviews were conducted both as one-off meetings and serial interviews. The disadvantage of one-off meetings is that I could only receive superficial information about an interviewee's life. Therefore, I asked my interviewees if they could do serial interviews. Since most of the interviewees were connections of my friends' whom I met while working in the factory, most of them allowed me to do serial interviews.

Serial interviews are “a number of interviews with the same people over a period of time” (Crang and Cook, 2007, 73). I met my interviewees biweekly and followed their lives. The advantage of serial interviews is that they allowed me to form closer bonds and greater trust with the interviewees as I was able to have more frequent interactions with the same person over a period of time. Hence, my interviewees gradually felt more comfortable in revealing their contradictory feelings. Moreover, serial interviews can also allow time for the interviewees to think about their contradictory and inconsistent feelings and stories. In response to questions during a one-off interview, “most interviewees will not come up with fully formed concepts, stories and arguments” (Crang and Cook, 2007, 76). However, by doing serial interviews, the interviewees will have the time and the opportunity to “flesh out these concepts, stories, and arguments, to help to make them fuller and more understandable” (Crang and Cook, 2007, 76). Consequently, serial interviews allow respondents to provide a more definitive answer at the next meeting.

One limitation of doing interviews with the people from Myanmar was the possibility of receiving inaccurate or incomplete information due to a lack of trust in me. When conducting the first initial interviews, most of the interviewees usually talked about the positive experiences and aspects of Thailand. However, after meeting almost every week, they started revealing more of their actual feelings about their life and experiences in Thailand.

### **Data analysis**

The data I have received from my participant observation, interviews, and archival research are both paper notes and audio files. To analyze these data, I first looked at my research

questions and created the keywords for each research question. To analyze data gained from participant observation, I typed all information I had received into my laptop every day. Every week, I added keywords for each story and grouped or classified the information by giving it codes or colors. To analyze data received from the interviews, I transcribed all information and typed all information from my notes into my laptop. After transcribing, I separated each topic by assigning them a different color. I also added keywords on each page of the document to make them easily searchable. Additionally, to analyze archival research, I photocopied or scanned materials and saved them into my laptop. Afterward, I summarized each concept and connected them together. Finally, after receiving all information, I connected, interrelated, and classified all information by looking through the keywords and colors I gave earlier. I also interpreted and provided meanings to the information.

### **Having done empirical studies and data analysis**

After getting to know some migrant workers from Myanmar, doing participant observations, conducting interviews, collecting information from archives, and analyzing all information, I divided the information into three main points for my three main chapters. These points are the information related to the coming of migrant workers, the information related to the relationships between the workers and state actors, and the information related to the workers' life in the factory. I also connected this information with theories and divided them into three chapters. Therefore, in the following chapters, I illustrate this information along with some theories, such as social networks, managers of unease, space of encounter, and identities. In chapter three, I explain how migrant workers from Myanmar are constructed as Other through

space by using the information related to the coming of migrant workers to Samut Sakhon Province. In chapter four, I demonstrate the construction of Othering through the managers of unease by using the information related to the relationships between migrant workers from Myanmar and state actors. Finally, I use the information related to workers' life in the factory to explain how migrant workers are constructed as Other through the idea of identities.

### **Chapter 3. Opportunity or trap: Coming to the biggest Burmese community in Thailand**

“Mahachai, the Hongsawadi” is a Facebook location tag, referring to the Mahachai area. The Mahachai area has become the second “Hongsawadi” for many Thai people and people from Myanmar. Many Thais whom I met and interviewed, including my mom and my friends, think that it is a dangerous place to visit because there are numerous migrant workers from Myanmar living there. Because place and race are co-constructed, it is not just the Mahachai area that is depicted as a dangerous place; people who live in the Mahachai area are also stereotyped as low-paid dangerous Burmese workers. In this chapter, I illustrate how the Mahachai area constructs the image of the Other to people who live in the area, and how that connects to the reasons why migrant workers from Myanmar are seen as dangerous Burmese for native-born people. I also demonstrate the co-production of space and race. I trace back to how Samut Sakhon Province (Mahachai area) has been constructed and investigate how Samut Sakhon Province has become a Burmese ethnic niche in Thailand. What made this space become a pool for migrant workers from Myanmar? Why did migrant workers decide to come here?

According to my ethnographic study in Samut Sakhon Province for more than one year and interviews with several migrant workers from Myanmar, I found that social networks are a significant factor drawing migrant workers from Myanmar to the Mahachai area. Recent studies have illustrated three types of social networks: social networks developed in the neighborhood, ethnic networks, and gender networks (Granovetter, 1973; Portes and Bach, 1985; Hanson and Pratt, 1988; Bailey and Waldinger, 1991; Stoll, 1999; Light, Bernard and Kim, 1999; Ellis, Wright and Parks, 2004; Parks, 2004a; 2004b; and Bauder, 2005). However, recent studies,

either on social networks (Eberts and Randall, 1998; Hanson and Pratt, 1988; Hiebert, 1999; Pratt, 1999; Bauder and Sharpe, 2000; McGuire, 2002; Yeung, 2002; Elliott and Smith 2004; Wright, 2004; Parks, 2004a; 2004b; Ellis, Wright and Parks, 2007; and Tammaru, Strömberg, Ham and Danzer, 2016) or on the Burmese migrant workers in Thailand (Ndegwa, 2016; Jirattikorn, 2008; and McLaughlin, 2010), have rarely discussed other factors that might cause the construction of an ethnic niche. Therefore, in this study, I discuss not only social networks of migrant workers from Myanmar but also other factors that allow Mahachai to become a pool of migrant workers from Myanmar. My main argument is that even though social networks of migrant workers from Myanmar are a significant factor affecting them to come to the Mahachai area, other important factors exist. These other factors include government policies, job opportunities, geographical factors, social and cultural preferences, brokers, and physical accessibility. These elements all have significant impacts on making Mahachai the biggest Burmese labor market where migrant workers are easily constructed as Other and further exploited in Thailand.

I will first begin with the background on why migrant workers from Myanmar are seen as dangerous Burmese and how the Mahachai area constructs the image of Other to workers who live there. Afterward, I explain the theory of geography of labor and labor geographies, following with the significance of social networks in creating an ethnic niche and the division of labor. In the next section, I demonstrate the idea of social networks in relation to the situation of migrant workers from Myanmar in the Mahachai area. In the fourth section, I explain other factors that push migrant workers from Myanmar to come and work in the Mahachai area.

Finally, I share stories of some migrant workers from Myanmar who have come to the Mahachai area.

### **Burmese people: Thai's national enemy**

Native-born people who have no experience living or working with migrant workers from Myanmar usually view migrant workers from Myanmar as dangerous Burmese. Even though workers from Myanmar in Thailand came from different parts of Myanmar and are different ethnicities, they are essentialized as Burmese (Plethong, 2014). From the native-born people's perspective, all Burmese are dangerous. My mother, for example, did not know that workers in Samut Sakhon Province have different ethnicities, and some of them are even Thai. She was very worried when she heard that I had to go work in a factory in this area. She thought that Mahachai was a dangerous place because there are numerous Burmese people there. It is not only my mother who has this perception. Most of my friends in Bangkok shared similar views when I talked about Mahachai. They think that there are only Burmese workers in the Mahachai area and those workers are dangerous. The common belief is that Burmese people are criminals. A friend of mine, who is the owner of an ice factory in Chantaburi, a province in eastern Thailand, told me, "Mahachai looks very dangerous. You have to take care of yourself." I also asked her to compare migrant workers from Myanmar with migrant workers from Cambodia since most of her employees are migrant workers from Cambodia. She told me that "Cambodian people are nicer and more kind. The Burmese are crueller and more dangerous. I know that the Burmese work harder, but I prefer to work with the Cambodians." According to the conversations with my friend and my mother, it is crucial to understand why many native-born people think that people

from Myanmar are dangerous even though they have never met people from Myanmar. Who constructs this perspective, and how?

I was educated in the Thai educational system. In history classes during middle school and high school, I had to study the history and wars between Thailand and Myanmar. At that time, students were taught to hate Burmese people because Burmese people came to the Ayutthaya Kingdom (Thailand at that time) and destroyed the city and temples and killed many Thai people. We were taught to believe that Burmese people were cruel and our national enemy. We were also taught to disregard how Thai people had also demolished Burmese cities and temples and killed Burmese people (Launay, 1920; and Wongthet, 2017). Schools and the educational system played a significant role in constructing the image of Burmese people. However, why were Burmese people constructed as dangerous and harmful? Who determined this image construction? According to Nidhi Eoseewong (1997), the Burmese were constructed as a dangerous enemy as a part of nation-building by the Thai state. To help increase a sense of nationalism, it was necessary to construct the image of a national enemy. A national enemy was as necessary as the construction of a national anthem or a national flag. Burmese people and the history between Thailand and Myanmar were chosen to create the story of the national enemy. For example, a famous history book illustrated the Burmese, the victors of the war, in this way:

The victors behaved like Vandals. The palace, the principal buildings, and thousands of private houses were soon a prey to flames, and their sacrilegious lust for destruction did not permit the victors to spare even the temple dedicated to the cult of their own faith. All the largest and most beautiful images of Buddha were hacked in

pieces, and many of them were burnt for the sake of the gold leaf with which they were coated (Wood, n.d., 249).

Accordingly, as a Thai educated in the Thai educational system during the nation-building process, I viewed people from Myanmar as dangerous and cruel Burmese who are our national enemy. The Thai state continues to re-depict the image of Burmese people by rewriting new history textbooks. Although numerous historians attempt to explain the real history to deconstruct the stereotype of Burmese people, Burmese people are still constructed as villains by other means such as news, social media, and Thai dramas. Two famous Thai dramas, *Nai Khanom Tom* and *Bang Rachan*, which illustrate Burmese people as villains and Thai people as heroes, are regularly aired on Thai television. Therefore, Thai people have regular exposure to media of messages to hate and fear the people from Myanmar. The Thai state succeeded in constructing Burmese people as the national enemy. Even at present, people from Myanmar are still seen as dangerous Burmese by many Thai people.

### **Mahachai: A dangerous Myanmar town**

Mahachai is an area that reflects the hatred of Thai people toward people from Myanmar. It also reveals the relationships and the boundaries between Thai people and people from Myanmar. In the Mahachai area, migrant workers from Myanmar are viewed and treated as Other, or non-Thai, who can be easily exploited and abused. Exploitation, ignorance, and oppression are the leading practices showing the boundaries between native-born people and migrant workers from Myanmar. Living in the Mahachai area does not just make the workers Other, but it also makes their lives somewhat precarious. Police officers, for example, usually

ask migrant workers from Myanmar in the Mahachai area for bribes. Workers from Myanmar in the furniture factory explained how they traveled to many provinces in Thailand, however, they had never met any police officers like those who work in the Mahachai area. One of my Mon friends told me:

“The police officers in the Mahachai area are merciless. They always look for bribes. Even though we have all the required documents, they just want our money. So, they ask for some receipt of the document, which we did not keep. They ask us to pay them if we do not want to have a problem. We have to pay them.”

Thai brokers and Thai government officers are other groups of people who try to take advantage of migrant workers in the Mahachai area. Usually, the brokers work together with the government officers. Without brokers, government officers would not allow illegal migrant workers to obtain work permits (more explanation in chapter four). However, if the workers hire a broker to help with the application process, they can get a work permit easily. Exploitation is, thus, a form of practice to draw the boundaries between Thai (officials, police officials, and brokers) and migrant workers from Myanmar.

Two other forms of practice showing the boundaries between Thai people and migrant workers from Myanmar in the Mahachai area are oppression and ignorance. Due to the Thai educational system under the nation-building process, Thai people view migrant workers from Myanmar as dangerous Burmese and enemies. Some Thai employers, therefore, think that they can oppress migrant workers from Myanmar (NG Thai, 2019). Even some Thai teenagers in the Mahachai area believe that the rape and abuse of migrant women is justified because these

migrants are dangerous and they are Thai people's enemies (Khonchaikhop, 2009). Although many Thai people do not oppress migrant workers, they also do not offer support to migrant workers from Myanmar. They do not want to work with or stay with migrant workers from Myanmar. They decide to ignore migrant workers' problems when migrant workers are oppressed or abused by employers or the police. Similar ideas are shown in Thai social media and Facebook; many Thai people think that migrant workers do not deserve any human rights in Thailand (more explanation in chapter four).

These forms of practice (exploitation, ignorance, and oppression) become customary for people in the Mahachai area. Migrant workers have come to accept their precarious life and allow the exploitation and oppression to happen to them. Through these ways, the boundaries between migrant workers from Myanmar and Thai people in the Mahachai area are constantly being reproduced and delineated. The boundaries become natural for both migrant workers from Myanmar and Thai people.

Even though the Mahachai area creates a bad image of the workers who work there and it is a place where exploitation and oppression become customary, many migrant workers from Myanmar still move to work in this area. In the next section, I will explain the reasons and factors why migrant workers decide to come work in the Mahachai area. These factors link to the ideas of the geography of labor and labor geographies.

### **Geography of labor and labor geographies**

The study of labor in geography, or what was called "geography of labor" during the beginning of post-war to the 1970s, was dominated by neoclassical economists and locational

theorists (Herod, 2001). These scholars saw workers as a kind of capital. Because economic geographers thought that it is the firm that acts and plays an important role in economic systems, they did not theorize workers as active makers of economic geographies. They rarely talked about workers either as individuals or as members of social groups (Herod, 2001). After the 1970s, Marxist geographers saw workers as a class in capitalism. They started to look at laborers in relation to a capitalist economy. However, they conceptualized capital as the most important active agent structuring economic landscapes. They paid relatively little attention to conceptualize how workers' activities can directly and significantly shape the economic geography of capitalism (Herod, 2001).

In the 1990s, the study of labor shifted. Many scholars thought that workers play a significant role in shaping the uneven geographical development of capitalism. The term "labor geographies" was, thus, coined by Andrew Herod (1997). For Herod, labor geographies are "an effort to see the making of the economic geography of capitalism through the eyes of labor" (1997, 3). Labor geographers conceptualize and study workers as an active and capable agent (Herod, 1997; Castree, 2007). Therefore, we need to treat workers as social beings who can both intentionally and unintentionally produce economic geographies through their actions (Herod, 2001; and Yeung, 2002). In this period, several influential books that have various degrees of relevance for understanding labor geographies were published (Massey, 1984; Clark, 1989; Peck, 1996; Herod, 1997; 1998; 2001; Wills, 1999; Hudson, 2001; and Yeung, 2002). Works in labor geographies include the characteristics and limitations of labor geography in general (Castree, 2007), workers' solidarity (Herod, 2001; 2004), gender, network and labor (Hanson and Pratt, 1995; McDowell, 2008; and Wright, 2004), labor rights and labor organization (Hale and Wills,

2005), labor in producing landscape (Mitchell, 1996), new working-class studies (Russo and Linkon, 2005), and also labor market segmentation and division of labor (Eberts and Randall, 1998; Hanson and Pratt, 1988; 1995; Hiebert, 1999; Pratt, 1999; Bauder and Sharpe, 2000; Bauder, 2001; Ellis, Wright and Parks, 2004).

### **Labor market segmentation, division of labor and workers' networks**

Numerous researchers have examined how migrant labor has been segregated in the labor market and how the division of labor is created (McGuire, 2002; Elliott and Smith, 2004; Parks, 2004a; 2004b; Ellis, Wright and Parks, 2007; Hanson and Pratt, 1988; and Tammaru et al., 2016). Most studies show that migrant workers' social networks, ethnicity, neighborhoods, and gender play important roles in working decision (e.g., Granovetter, 1973; Portes and Bach, 1985; Hanson and Pratt, 1988; Bailey and Waldinger, 1991; Stoll, 1999; Light, Bernard and Kim, 1999; Ellis, Wright and Parks, 2004; Parks, 2004a; 2004b; and Bauder, 2005). These factors affect migrant workers' decisions about work and result in the creation of the division of labor and labor market segmentation.

Recent studies show that migrant workers' workplace depends on migrant workers' residence. Migrant workers' residence restricts the migrant workers' access to information about job opportunities and constrains migrant workers' ability to engage in daily communication (Ellis, Wright and Parks, 2004; and Hanson and Pratt, 1988). This research posits that migrant workers mostly work in the workplace close to their residential area because jobs closer to home are easier to find, and jobs closer to home require less commuting and travel expenses. This idea supports the spatial mismatch hypothesis that job access affects employment outcomes (Holzer,

Ihlanfeldt, and Sjoquist, 1994; Holzer and Ihlanfeldt, 1996; McLafferty and Preston, 1996; Stoll, 1998; 1999; 2000; and Raphael, 1998a; 1998b). The spatial mismatch hypothesis points out that the commuting distance and job-search costs will increase significantly with the distance between the available job and the workers' residence, and this affects the work decision (Mouw, 2002).

Additionally, the home environment can provide varying opportunities for socialization for migrant workers. The migrant workers' residential area plays a significant role in shaping migrant workers' social networks (Fernandez-Kelly, 1995; and Wang, 2010). Workers need socialization, interactions with their neighbors, and household negotiation. Migrant workers tend to consider jobs from their local socialization and social networks.

Migrant workers' residence is sometimes segregated by ethnicity (Massey, Gross, and Shibuya, 1994; Farley and Frey, 1994; Stoll, 2000; Glaeser and Vigdor, 2001; Iceland, 2004; Taeuber and Taeuber, 1965; Parks, 2004b; Glasmeier and Farrigan, 2007; Strömberg, Tammaru, Danzer, van Ham, Marcinczak, Stjernström and Lindgren, 2014; van Kempen and Wissink, 2014; and Tammaru et al., 2016). This ethnic-enclave residence leads to employment segregation and segregated workplaces (Ellis, Wright and Parks, 2004; Parks, 2004b; and Tammaru et al., 2016). Workers usually find jobs close to their homes or jobs that are suggested by their neighbors. Thus, sites of work are clustered by the ethnicity of the workers' residence. Therefore, the relationship between migrant workers' residence and labor market segregation may depend on migrant workers' social networks in the residential place, rather than the distance between

home and place and the spatial accessibility (Mier and Giloth, 1985; Hanson and Pratt, 1995; and Parks, 2004b).

Even though rich literature has suggested the role of social networks within migrant workers' neighborhoods in creating labor market segregation (Stoll, 2000; Ellis, Wright and Parks, 2004; Elliott and Smith, 2004; Glasmeier and Farrigan, 2007; Wang, 2010; and Parks, 2004b), the practices of social networks are not confined to the migrant workers' neighborhoods. The practices of social networks can happen in any other place, such as in workplaces or migrant workers' hometowns (Everitt, 1976; and Wang, 2010). Qingfang Wang (2010) emphasized that migrant workers are more likely to exchange information with people whom they interact with during their daily lives. Therefore, migrant workers can receive information about jobs from people in the workplace, in the markets, or in any other place (Model, 1993; Waldinger, 1994; Parks, 2004b; Granovetter, 1974; and Wang, 2010). Additionally, several studies have shown that networks are more likely to be developed by kin and ethnicity, rather than by space (Hanson and Pratt, 1988; 1995; and Ellis, Wright and Parks, 2004). Migrant workers use kin and race networks from their hometown to gain access to jobs. These kin and ethnicity networks channel migrant workers into sectors where co-ethnics concentrate (Light and Bonacich, 1988; and Elliott and Smith, 2004).

Social networks provide a crucial link between migrants and jobs, resulting in the emergence of the ethnic niche. These social networks are helpful in recruiting friends, family, and neighbors into jobs, and they are always welcomed by employers (Johnson-Webb, 2002; Parks, 2004b; Wang, 2010; and Ellis, Wright and Parks, 2007). It is common for employers to

recruit new workers through current employees' networks. Ellis, Wright and Parks (2007) demonstrated two reasons why employers prefer to hire workers using their current workers' social networks. First, recruiting workers from social networks help employers save time and money in searching for and selecting employees. The current employees' networks will screen new workers, and those workers who are supplied through and selected by networks can be hired immediately. Second, social networks have built-in "disciplinary mechanisms" (Ellis, Wright and Parks, 2007), such as "bounded solidarity and enforceable trust" (Portes and Zhou, 1992). These mechanisms motivate the current workers to recommend to employers the workers whom they know are hard workers, reliable and dedicated (Bailey and Waldinger, 1991; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993; Waldinger and Lichter, 2003; and Ellis, Wright and Parks, 2007). Therefore, the social networks, either those developed in the neighborhoods, workplaces, or through ethnicity and kinship, are significant parts of shaping the division of labor.

Some literature has illustrated that gender is another factor shaping the division of labor. Numerous scholars have summarized that social networks are more significant for migrant women than men (Hanson and Pratt, 1991; Tienda and Glass, 1985; Fernandez-Kelly, 1995; and Parks, 2004b). Female workers mostly rely on the information about job opportunities they receive from their family members and friends. Women tend to work in female-dominated jobs (Reskin, 1993; Reskin and Cassirer, 1996; Carlson, 1997; and Wang, 2010). As a consequence, information about jobs that circulate through women's networks is likely about jobs in which women are segregated (Parks, 2004b). Some literature has also demonstrated that women's jobs are more concentrated in semi-skilled or low skilled, unstable sectors with low pay, and poor working conditions (England, 1993; Hanson and Pratt, 1995; and Maume, 1999). Moreover,

some research has shown that women are more likely to give up better job opportunities to take jobs located close to home (Hanson and Johnston, 1985; Johnston-Anumonwo, 1988; and Ellis, Wright and Parks, 2004). Gendered networks, thus, direct migrant men and migrant women into different labor market positions and create the division of labor (Hiebert, 1999; Wright and Ellis, 2000; and Parks, 2004b).

### **Opportunity or trap: Social networks of migrant workers from Myanmar**

The idea of social networks and the division of labor can be used to explain why Mahachai has become the biggest Burmese community in Thailand and why many migrant workers from Myanmar came to work in the Mahachai area. People in Myanmar know about Mahachai through social networks in their neighborhoods or from their relatives. The information of Mahachai and the employment in the Mahachai area are spread broadly through workers from Myanmar who have worked in the Mahachai area. Accordingly, this information encourages residents in Myanmar to come and work in the Mahachai area. Wah Khaing, for instance, came to work in a furniture factory in the Mahachai area because of her sister's persuasion. Wah Khaing had worked as a housemaid for a family in Bangkok. The family was nice, and they taught her the Thai language. She can speak Thai fluently. However, working as a housemaid meant working 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Wah Khaing explained that she had no free time while she was working as a housemaid. Although she did not need to pay for living accommodation because she lived with the family, she had no private space. When her sister asked her to come and work at the factory in the Mahachai area, she decided to move. While work in other areas was available, she decided to work in the Mahachai area because her sister

was living and working there. However, at present, her sister has gone back to Myanmar; she, thus, encouraged her friends to work with her there. Many of Wah Khaing's friends, family members, and neighbors have come to work in the factory. Wah Khaing's story represents the importance of the social networks connected through kinship, friendship, and neighborhoods in searching for jobs in Thailand.

Moreover, employers also utilize current workers' social contacts for recruitment purposes (Johnson-Webb, 2002; Parks, 2004b; Wang, 2010; and Ellis, Wright and Parks, 2007). Lots of migrant workers from Myanmar working in the Mahachai area have been recruited through friends and family members who work in the area. For example, most workers in the furniture factory knew each other before coming to work in the factory. Some people are related. Some are friends. Some are neighbors from their home villages and towns. Wah Khaing is the person who helps her employer recruit other workers from Myanmar. When her boss requires more workers, Wah Khaing will contact her friends in her hometown, Bago, to come and work in Mahachai. However, sometimes, if there are not enough people in Bago to come and work there, she will ask other workers in the factory whether they can contact their friends or family members to come. She said, "It is better to find someone you know to work with you because not all people from Myanmar are good; they can be cruel." To reduce the problem and prevent any future harm to her and other workers, she will not introduce any workers that she does not know to her boss.

As one worker extends a hand to friends and family members, job information spreads quickly and widely through an ethnic and national network (Waldinger, 1996). The ethnic

networks reinforces the ethnic segregation of jobs by channeling co-ethnics into similar jobs and the same workplaces. In the factory that Wah Khaing is working at, most of the migrant workers are from Mon state. This is because Wah Khaing is Mon, and she is a person who has been helping her boss recruit workers from Myanmar for around eight to nine years. Wah Khaing took this responsibility since her sister had resigned from the job in 2011 and she has been willing to do this job despite there being no financial compensation. When Wah Khaing first came to work at the factory, there were only five migrant workers from Myanmar in the factory, including Wah Khaing and her sister. However, after migrant workers from Myanmar came to work in the factory, the employer liked their industriousness. The employer, thus, preferred to hire migrant workers from Myanmar. Based on Wah Khaing and her sister's social networks, the furniture factory became a Mon-ethnic-dominant factory. However, some workers came from Karen state and Dawei city. Karen and Dawei workers were recruited by Wah Khaing's friends, who are Karen and Dawei people. Using migrant workers' social networks for recruiting workers from Myanmar is quite common in the Mahachai area. The same recruiting process has been happening in a textile factory in the Mahachai area as well. Noi, a Karen migrant worker in the textile factory, is the person who has the responsibility to recruit workers from Myanmar. Since Noi recruited the workers in this factory, the main workers in the factory are Karen. Therefore, the workers' social network builds the ethnic structure of the workers in the factory.

Similar to ethnic networks, national networks also reinforce the national segregation of jobs by channeling co-nationals into similar jobs and the same workplaces. In the furniture factory, for example, Wah Khaing always recruits people from Myanmar. She has never recruited anyone from Thailand, Cambodia, or Laos. In the same vein, Kloy, Kung, and Som,

Thai workers in the factory, only recruit workers from Thailand. As a consequence, the factory has only workers from Myanmar and Thailand. There are no Cambodians or Laotians in the factory.

It is not just the workers from Myanmar that use their social networks for finding jobs. Thai workers also use their social networks. Work in this furniture factory can be divided into two main categories: office work and unskilled work. Office workers will work in the office with an air conditioner. They can sit while they are working. Unskilled workers have to work in the warehouse. The unskilled workers have to work in a hot climate since there is no fan or air conditioner in the warehouse. All workers from Myanmar work as unskilled workers in the warehouse while the office workers are Thai. It is impossible for workers from Myanmar to work in the office since office work is confined to the owner's relatives. Work in this factory is based on kinship. Those who work there got the job through their kinship network. The manager of the factory got the job because she is a sister of the owner's wife. An export officer knew about this job from the manager who is her aunt. A stock official could apply for the job because of the export officer who is her sister-in-law. Similarly, I got my job because of my kinship network. I have three cousins working in the office, and the owner of the factory is my distant relative. I could work in the factory because of them. They also allowed me to choose where I wanted to work, in the office or the warehouse. Since I wanted to be close to the migrant workers from Myanmar, I decided to work in the warehouse as an unskilled laborer. For other ethnic workers or even Thai workers without connections, it is very difficult to work in the office in this factory. The kinship network segregates the office workers from the unskilled workers.

Some geographers also point to the significance of gender networks to find jobs. Women will indeed receive information about jobs from their close friends (often female), family, or people who live nearby. However, in the case of migrant workers from Myanmar in the Mahachai area, the gender network is less significant than the ethnic and national networks. Migrant workers from Myanmar are more concerned about ethnicity and nationality than gender when they are recruiting workers to work in the factory. Wah Khaing, for example, as a Mon worker, preferentially recruited Mon people to work in the factory. She prefers to recruit Mon men or women rather than female workers who are of different ethnicity from her. Similarly, Noi, a Karen worker in the textile factory, always recruits Karen workers to work in the factory with less concern about gender. Therefore, these factories are neither female-dominated nor male-dominated. Rather they are Mon-dominated and Karen-dominated factories. Gender social network is less important than the ethnic and national networks.

Accordingly, social relationships or social networks affect the workers' decisions to come work in the Mahachai area. Even though social networks help migrant workers find jobs, they restrict migrant workers to work in specific jobs in specific areas. In the case of the Mahachai area, migrant workers are socially trapped to work in an area where they are constructed as dangerous Burmese and being exploited, oppressed, and ignored.

### **Factors to the emergence of the biggest Burmese community in Thailand**

Social networks are not the only factors that cause geographically, socially, and economically segregated migrant workers from Myanmar to stay and work in the Mahachai area.

Three other factors (geographical factor, social and cultural preference, and brokers and accessibility) also push migrant workers to come work in the Mahachai area.

### *Geographical factor*

Geographically, Thailand, and Myanmar are close to each other. They are neighboring countries. Therefore, illegal and legal cross-borders take place frequently in borderland areas such as Tak, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Ranong. However, a non-physical borderland, like Samut Sakhon Province, is also affected by this geographical factor.

Samut Sakhon Province is not just the biggest Burmese community in Thailand, but it is also the biggest Mon, Karen, and Burmese ethnic enclave in Thailand. According to my interviews with migrant workers from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon province, most workers came to the Mahachai area through either the Mae Sot-Myawaddy border or the Ranon-Kaw Thauung border. Therefore, a majority of people who have come to Samut Sakhon Province are Mon, Karen, and Burmese in ethnicity. Most Karen people live in Kayin State and Kayah State in Myanmar. Kayin State connects with the Tak Province. Therefore, many Karen workers from Kayin State can cross borders by using the Mae Sot-Myawaddy border in the Tak Province. Mon State and Bago Division connect to Kayin State; therefore, many Mon workers from Mon State and Bago Division travel to Myawaddy in the Kayin State in order to cross the border to Thailand.

On the other hand, many Burmese workers in Samut Sakhon Province came from the Tanintharyi Division, which connects to Kayin State in Myanmar and several provinces in southern Thailand. Thus, Burmese workers from the Tanintharyi Division can either travel to the

Mae Sot-Myawaddy border or the Ranong-Kaw Thaug border to cross the border to Thailand. However, Burmese people who live in other regions are not usually seen in Samut Sakhon Province since their regions are not close to the Tak Province or the Ranong Province. Therefore, they might use different ways to come to Thailand and travel to work in other places. Moreover, due to the social networks that the current or previous workers from the Mon State, Bago Division, Kayin State and Tanintharyi Division in Samut Sakhon Province have used, new Mon, Karen and Burmese workers have been moving to work in Samut Sakhon Province. Samut Sakhon Province is the primary destination for Mon, Karen, and Burmese workers.

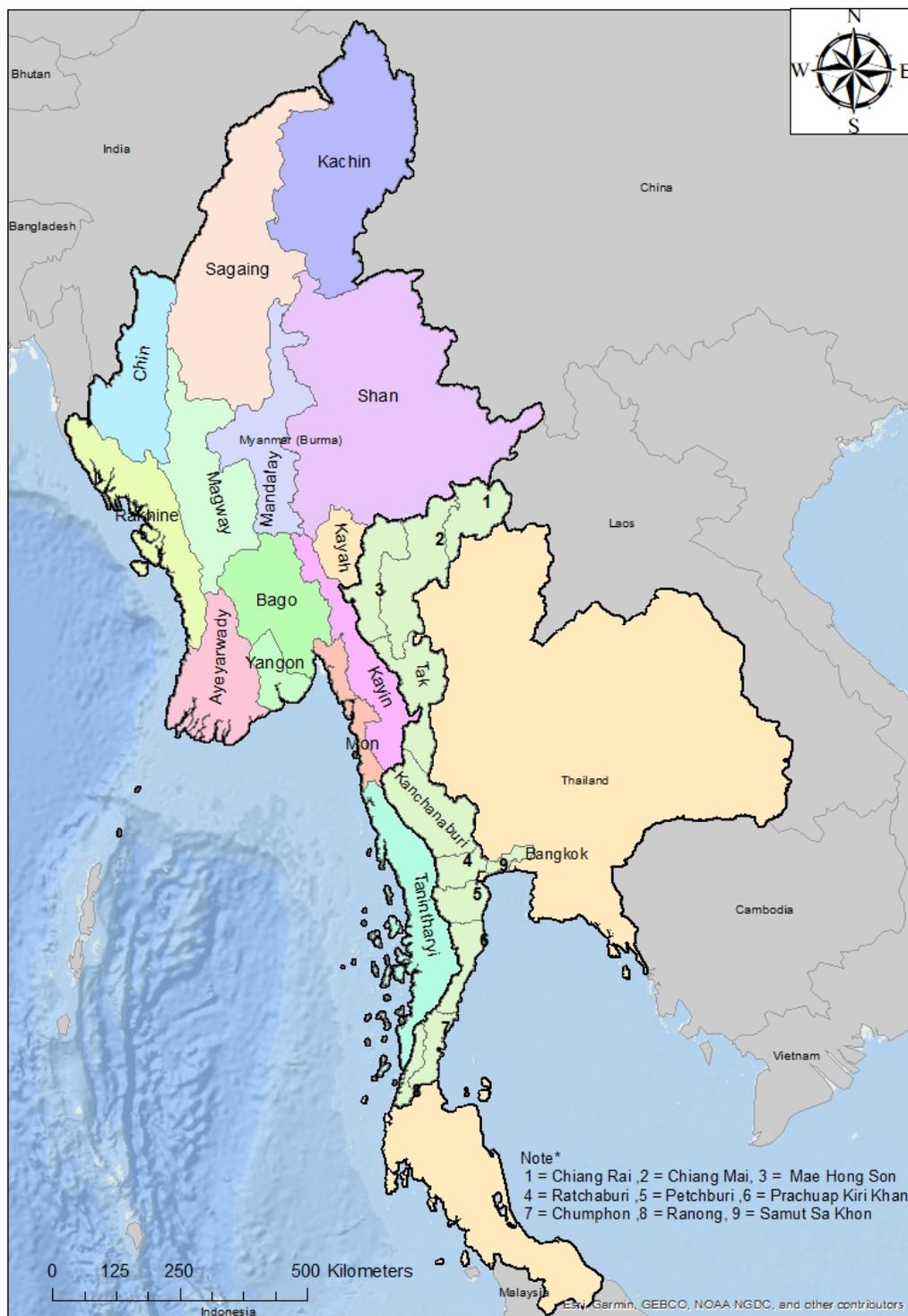


Figure 3: Regions of Myanmar connect to provinces of Thailand

### *Social and cultural preference*

According to the theory of the geography of labor from Marxist geographers, capitalist processes have produced space unevenly, and this process causes labor migration. In essence, Mahachai has been produced by the capitalist process through the migration of workers from Myanmar to Thailand because laborers from Thailand became too expensive and hard to find. However, the idea of the geography of labor is problematic in the way that it marginalizes the active roles of workers conceptually (Herod, 2001). Capital is not the only active agent structuring the Mahachai landscape. Moreover, it is not the only reason for labor migration in the Mahachai area. The concept pays relatively little attention to conceptualizing how workers' backgrounds and preferences play roles in the process of labor migration.

Some workers from Myanmar prefer to work in Thailand rather than in their home country, not just because Thailand has more job opportunities than in Myanmar, but also because living in Thailand provides them with better access to education and healthcare. According to government policies, all migrant workers' children can attend public schools in Thailand. In the past, the Thai government did not recognize these migrant children. They were uneducated and vulnerable to various forms of exploitation (Vungsiriphisal, Rukspollamuang and Chantavanich, 2013); they became victims of bullying, sexual harassment, trafficking, and underage forced labor in unsafe factories (ILO-IPEC, 2013). Without being educated, these migrant children were considered to have the potential to become a big problem in society (Tin Maung Htwe, 2014). Therefore, in order to prevent these problems, the government launched policies to help these children by allowing them access to the educational system in Thailand.

In 1992, the Ministry of Education launched a policy to provide disadvantaged groups of children access to education. The policy stated that all minorities and non-Thai children who reside in Thailand could access the Thai national education system (Vungsiriphisal et al., 2013). This policy later evolved into the first National Education Act in 1999, which states that “every person has an equal right and opportunity to have access to quality basic education” (Vungsiriphisal et al., 2013, 222). However, the policy only allowed the children who had legal identification documents to gain access to public education (Vungsiriphisal et al., 2013; and Tin Maung Htwe, 2014). Numerous undocumented children remained unable to study in Thai schools.

In 2004, the Ministry of Education announced a new education strategy for underprivileged groups of children (Tin Maung Htwe, 2014). The new policy detailed the principle that “every child in Thailand, regardless of nationality, was eligible for education with or without any identification documents” (Vungsiriphisal et al., 2013, 219). This solution is significant to migrant children because many migrant children do not have identity documents or legal status. In addition, the Ministry of Interior issued all undocumented children who have entered into any local school with a 13-digit identity number. This means all children who register to study in Thai local schools will be identified and recorded in the Thai official census system (Office of the Education Council, 2008). Accordingly, some migrant workers from Myanmar prefer to stay and work in Thailand because their children can study in Thailand. Moe Kyaw, for instance, prefers to live and work in Thailand because living in Thailand can provide a better opportunity for his children. He has lived in Thailand for almost 20 years. He has two

sons, both of whom study in Thai schools. He said he does not want to go back to work in Myanmar because he wants his sons to study at a Thai university.

Moreover, working in Thailand allows migrant workers to have a social security card (Prachachat, 2019). However, only a documented migrant worker holding a work permit and a passport can register for a social security card, and it can be registered through the employers only. Migrant workers can use this card in public hospitals that are registered. The card allows them to be treated in these hospitals for free. Furthermore, medical care in Thailand is more developed than in Myanmar. It is also cheaper than being treated in Myanmar because in Myanmar, they have to pay for the full price. Many migrant workers, therefore, prefer to stay and work in Thailand because of the opportunities in education and healthcare.

Cultural and religious practices are another reason migrant workers decide to come and work in certain areas. Mahachai, for example, has countless workers from Mon state, Karen state, and the Tanintharyi Division. Nearly all of them are Buddhist. Some migrant workers believe in other religions or are non-religious, but they are not clearly visible in the Mahachai area. Lots of temples have been constructed in the area. Buddhist workers from Myanmar prefer to go to the temples on Sundays and holidays. Workers may visit the temples for meditation, praying, or helping monks clean the temples. Every Sunday, there will be a bus sent from a big temple in Bangkok to the migrant workers' dormitories. The bus comes to pick up migrant workers and take them to the temple. Lots of migrant workers from Myanmar like to go there, especially Dawei<sup>5</sup> workers, because there is a Dawei monk in the temple.

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<sup>5</sup> Dawei is known as Tawai in Thailand. It is a city in south-eastern Myanmar.



*Figure 4: Buddhist altar in a migrant worker from Myanmar's room*

Furthermore, in the morning, most of the Buddhist migrant workers from Myanmar will wake up early to cook and give food offerings to Buddhist monks in front of their dormitory or their workplace. On religious holidays, migrant workers from Myanmar usually go to the temple. Most of the factories in the Mahachai area will close on Buddhist holidays. The furniture factory, like other factories in the Mahachai area, is closed on Buddhist holidays in order to allow migrant workers from Myanmar to visit the temple. This was not always the case in the past. The decision to close the furniture factory on Buddhist holidays was shaped by the power of worker agency. On a Buddhist holiday several years ago, the furniture factory was opened, and the migrant workers had to come to work; however, the workers did not follow the factory's policy for missing work. Eighty percent of the workers did not come to work in the factory and instead went to the temple. The owner and the manager of the furniture factory did not know that the workers were not coming. They opened the factory and only a few workers showed up. The factory could not run with only those few workers. Therefore, on the next day,

the manager had to organize a prompt meeting and asked for their reason for not coming to work. The manager reprimanded the migrant workers that they should have informed her that they did not want to work on Buddhist holidays. As a result of this event, the owner and the manager decided to close the factory on every Buddhist holiday. This story shows the power of the worker agency in changing the way the furniture factory operates. It highlights how workers are active agents who can construct and reconstruct space and economic systems. However, the workers' operation and organization cannot always successfully be exercised against economic systems and employer's power. The workers' schedule is still mainly controlled by their employers.

The story of Aung Thun, Wah Khaing's brother, is an example of why Buddhist migrant workers like to work in the Mahachai area. Aung Thun had worked in the Mahachai area before moving to work in Malaysia. He went to Malaysia and worked in a restaurant. He said the work in Malaysia was easier and more comfortable than working in the factory in the Mahachai area. Moreover, he could earn more money than working in Thailand. He said the employer prepared everything for him, provided him accommodation, including daily meals, and he could save money there. He was happily working there. However, he could only stay in Malaysia for a few months. He explained that after working there for a while, he did not like living in Malaysia due to cultural and religious differences. He could not go out to the temple and he did not like the food the employer gave him. He wanted to cook, but he could not find any Burmese ingredients for cooking where he lived. Malaysia is not like Mahachai which has every Burmese ingredient he needs. Thus, he returned to the Mahachai area and decided to work there, although the work conditions and salary in the Mahachai area were worse than in Malaysia. Therefore, in some

cases like Aung Thun's, cultural and religious preference is more important for some migrant workers than income.

The number of migrant workers moving from Myanmar to work in Thailand is also the result of the Thai workers' preferences. Thai workers, nowadays, do not like working in the factory. They do not like working in any dirty, dangerous, and difficult jobs. Thai people who work in the factories in the Mahachai area are either people who have long been working there, people who are too old to apply for other jobs, or people whose husband or wife is working in the same factory. Other Thai people will apply for jobs such as work in an office or a mall. In addition to the type of job, some Thai people do not like working alongside migrant workers from Myanmar because of the national prejudice that has been instilled in them through history textbooks, news, and social media. In the furniture factory, initially, there were a lot of Thai workers from around 2008 to 2009, with only five migrant workers from Myanmar. According to my interviews with the workers in the factory, some Thai workers started leaving because they could not endure working in the factory, thus, the employer decided to hire more migrant workers from Myanmar. Another reason was that Thai people who could work in the factory did not like migrant workers from Myanmar. They did not want to teach migrant workers about their jobs. They did not like the way the employer compared them to the migrant workers. Consequently, most of the Thai workers quit the job. For these reasons—the preference of the Thai workers who want to work in a comfortable job and work only with Thai people—there was not sufficient labor for factories in the Mahachai area. Thus, more and more migrant workers from Myanmar were accepted to work in the factory in the Mahachai area.

### *Brokers and accessibility*

Mahachai is easy for migrant workers from Myanmar to access even though, geographically, Mahachai is far from Myanmar. There are two main methods to get into the Mahachai area. One way is that migrant workers can come to the Mahachai area through brokers. Hiring brokers is the most popular and easiest way for migrant workers from Myanmar to work in other countries. After receiving information about the job and the workplace, the interested worker has to contact the employer first. In this process, his/her friend or family member working at the factory has to help him/her contact the employer. If the employer allows him/her to work at the factory, the worker will then contact a broker. The worker has to pay the broker a brokerage fee. The brokerage fees range from 20,000 baht to 30,000 baht (about 660 dollars to 1,000 dollars) per person to come to Bangkok or Samut Sakhon Province. Even though they come to work in the same area and the same factory, the cost varies depending on which broker they use. The broker will prepare a temporary immigration document for the worker and appoint a pick-up place and time. The broker will send a car to pick up the worker and send the worker to the workplace or place of residence.

There are cases where the employer also utilizes brokers. The employer will order the number of workers that they need and hire the brokers to find those workers for them. The Thai broker will contact the brokers in Myanmar to recruit the workers. The brokers in Myanmar will go out to find people in the villages who want to work in Thailand and then will send those workers to the factory in Thailand. In this case, the information about working in the Mahachai is spread by brokers. Villagers who want to work in Thailand will come with the brokers. In this

scenario, the employer will pay for the fee but the worker has to work to repay the employer. Most of the employers do not ask for interest, but they keep migrant workers' passports in order to make sure that migrant workers work with them until they repay the fee.

Since workers in Myanmar who want to work in Thailand must rely so heavily on brokers, it is not unheard of where workers are lured in by fake brokers. The fake brokers will pretend that they have orders to recruit workers from Thai employers and they will send those workers to work in Thailand. The fake brokers will ask the workers to pay half of the brokerage fee before going to Thailand and pay another half after arriving at the factory. However, after collecting the workers and receiving the money, fake brokers do not send the workers to the factory. They will leave the workers in places in Thailand, such as forests, mountains, or even in houses in the city. The fake brokers lure the workers saying that there will be another broker who will come and pick them up at those places. However, in reality, no one comes to pick up the workers. The workers are abandoned at these places and become undocumented migrants in Thailand.

In 2016, I went to a house in Samut Sakhon Province with some officials of LPN. I met five migrant workers from Myanmar who were lured by a fake broker to come to Thailand. The workers told us that their broker promised he could help them find a job in a factory in the Mahachai area and he would prepare all the documents for them. Therefore, they decided to come to Thailand with the broker and paid brokerage fee, which was about 20,000 baht (about 660 dollars) for each person. The broker then brought them to Mahachai and left them at a house. The broker told them that there would be another person to come and pick them up. However, no

one came and they never heard from the broker again. They could not speak Thai nor did they have any documents. They then realized that they were deceived by that broker. Fortunately, a current worker in the Mahachai area found them and contacted the LPN to help them. The LPN, therefore, went to the house, collected all the migrants' information, and contacted the government officials to file the case. The result of the case depended on the negotiation between the LPN and the government officials. However, this kind of story is not typical. Only a small fraction of undocumented workers from Myanmar in Thailand arrive through fake brokers. It is more often the case that workers from Myanmar become undocumented because they came to Thailand illegally through their own means.

Brokers can send migrant workers from Myanmar to work in different countries but why do workers decide to come to work in the Mahachai area in Thailand? Certainly, workers learn about working in the Mahachai area through their social networks and Mahachai does provide the workers with job opportunities and good salaries. However, there are other countries that can provide better job opportunities and salaries than working in Mahachai, such as Japan, Korea, or the United States. The workers also hear about other countries from their social networks. The primary reason is because going to these countries requires a large amount of money—up to ten times or more what it would typically cost to go to Thailand. The workers cannot afford to pay such high brokerage fees. Going to Korea, for instance, requires the workers to pay about 200,000 baht (about 6,660 dollars). The brokerage fee is a significant limiting factor that channels workers to work in Thailand or the Mahachai area.

The second method of coming to Mahachai and working in the area is illegal entry through the Thailand-Myanmar borders. Thai territories connect with Myanmar territories; therefore, people from Myanmar and Thailand can cross borders easily—both legally and illegally. Due to the conflicts in Myanmar, countless people in Myanmar have fled to Thailand through these borders. They entered Thailand and stayed and worked in Thailand illegally. Two main borders are used by workers from Myanmar to enter Thailand and come to the Mahachai area: the Mae Sot-Myawaddy border and the Ranong-Kaw Thaug border.

The Mae Sot-Myawaddy border is the primary border used by workers from Myanmar to come to Mahachai. Mae Sot is a district in the Tak province in northwestern Thailand, about 426 kilometers northwest of Bangkok. Mae Sot is close to Myawaddy, a town in southeastern Myanmar, in Kayin State. Myawaddy is about 170 kilometers east of Mawlamyine, the fourth largest city of Myanmar. However, there is a river, Moei River (Thaug Yinn River), that separates Mae Sot from Myawaddy. Mae Sot has long been used as a gate to enter Thailand. About fifteen to twenty years ago, people from Myawaddy would swim or take a boat across the river and to get to Mae Sot. If they wanted to go to work in Bangkok or the Mahachai area, they would hide in the forest and walk through the forest to central Thailand. Some of them might be able to find a better way to travel to Thailand, such as taking a bus or car. However, according to my interviews, the interviewees who illegally entered Thailand more than fifteen years ago without using a broker said that they walked to the central part of Thailand. At present, there are several ways to enter Thailand from this border. First, people can cross the border by using the border checkpoint. The border checkpoints of Myanmar and Thailand are connected by a bridge. People who use the border checkpoint have to have legal documents to come and work in

Thailand. However, some workers who do not have any immigration documents and work permits can enter Thailand by using the boat that docks at the bank of the river. The boats are waiting for the workers at Myawaddy's side, and they are not far from the border checkpoints. The boats are just about 300-500 meters from the bridge and the border checkpoints. The workers without documents, therefore, can take the boat to cross the river and the fee is just 20 baht (65 cents). There is no immigration official come to check them even though the boats are just 300 meters from the office. This is a reason why numerous undocumented workers from Myanmar have come and worked in Thailand. Another way that people from Myanmar use to cross the river to come to Thailand is by using a free boat at the casinos in Myanmar. Building a casino is prohibited in Thailand, but it is not forbidden in Myanmar. Therefore, many Thai investors and Chinese investors have built casinos in Myanmar along the river. The casinos prepare boats for their customers in Thailand to cross the river to come and play at the casinos and the customers do not need to pass any immigration process to cross the border to the casinos. Therefore, some workers from Myanmar use these boats to come to Thailand illegally.

Ranong-Kaw Thauang border is another main border located in the south of Myanmar and Thailand. Ranong is a province in southwestern Thailand. It is close to Kaw Thauang, a town of Myanmar. Ranong and Kaw Thauang are separated by the Andaman Ocean. Numerous boats run from ports at Kaw Thauang to the border checkpoint at Ranong. People who want to come to Thailand have to pass the immigration process at Kaw Thauang. Then, they have to take the boat to Ranong to follow the immigration process at the border checkpoint at Ranong. These processes require documents to enter Thailand. Similar to the Mae Sot-Myawaddy border, there are numerous boats that help undocumented migrant workers to cross the ocean. These migrants

enter Thailand illegally and afterward, they will move to other parts of Thailand, like Mahachai, by taking a bus, walking, or using a broker. Evidently, it is not difficult for undocumented migrant workers to access Thai territory through the Mae Sot-Myawaddy border and the Ranong-Kaw Thaug border.

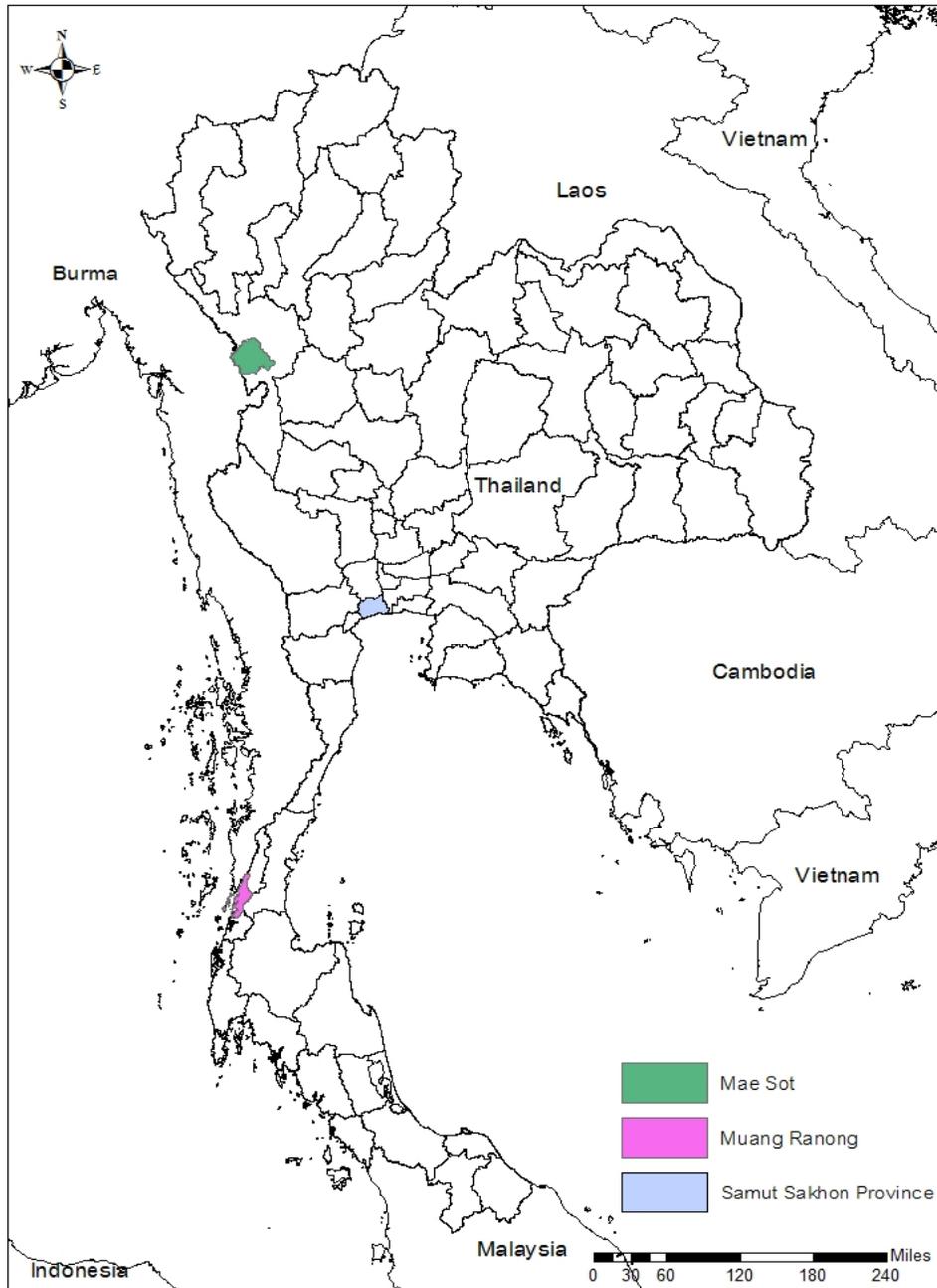


Figure 5: Muang Ranong, Mae Sot and Samut Sakhon Province in Thailand



*Figure 6: The bridge connecting between Myawaddy and Mae Sot*



*Figure 7: Boats used by illegal migrant workers from Myawaddy to enter Thailand*

## **Stories of traveling**

In the previous section, I explained the factors that push migrant workers from Myanmar to come and work in the Mahachai area and some of the means of getting into Thailand. In this part, I delve into detail how migrant workers travel to Thailand and share some of their experiences. I will illustrate this through stories of traveling of some migrant workers in the past and at present.

### *B's story*

B is a migrant worker working in the Mahachai area. She is a seller at a cafe at the Myanmar Mingalabar Center Organization (MMC). Previously, she used to work as a housemaid in Bangkok for several years. Afterward, she moved to work as a hair and nail dresser before coming to the Mahachai area. B's hometown is in Dawei, in southern Myanmar. About ten years ago, she heard about Thailand from her sister, who was working in Thailand at the time. She wanted to come and work in Thailand with her sister. However, she could not come by herself or even ask her sister to come and pick her up. She decided to contact a broker in her hometown. The broker also lived in Dawei and was well-known in the area. This broker was quite reliable because people in the town knew him and knew his house and family. The broker asked B to pay the fee of about 7,000-8,000 baht (230-260 dollars) but B was allowed to pay it after arriving at her sister's workplace. After contacting the broker, the broker set up a date, a time, and a place to pick her up, and he would bring her to Thailand through the Kaw Thaug-Ranong border.

B came to Bangkok alone. She said she was a little bit nervous but she was not worried because, as mentioned before, the broker was reliable. At the meeting place, B found that there

were about 15 people who would travel to Thailand together with her. These people came from the same province, Dawei. They traveled from Dawei to Kaw Thaug, which was not difficult to travel because they were still in Myanmar. After arriving at Kaw Thaug, the broker brought her to a house and told her and the others to rest and have some food. The broker prepared food for all the travelers; however, the food was terrible. B said she cried when she tasted the food. She said she had never had any food this bad before. However, she had to eat it. The broker said she would have to walk for days. If she did not eat it, she would not have enough energy to walk in Thailand.

In the house, there were members of B's group as well as other groups of people from different parts of Myanmar. These people were brought by different brokers. The house seemed to be a hub for people from Myanmar who wanted to travel to Thailand through the Kaw Thaug-Ranong border. B was in the house until a car came to pick her and her group up. The car was too small for 15 people so they had to crowd into the car. B did not know where she was being taken. She did not know where she was at that time. They were in the car for a while before having to transfer into a boat. After arriving at Ranong (at that time, she did not know that it was Ranong), they had to get into another car and stay in the car for several hours. After that, they were asked to exit the car and walk in the forest for another day and night. They had no food. Moreover, they had to hide from Thai soldiers. If they met any soldiers, they had to run away. Some people died in the forest because they got lost. B also mentioned that a friend of hers saw another migrant from Myanmar shot by a Thai soldier. The migrant died while she was walking in the forest to come to work in Thailand. Fortunately, B's friend escaped. Therefore, it was very risky for B to come to Thailand.

After walking for a day and a night, they finally reached their destination. There was a vehicle waiting for them. It was a police vehicle and the second broker was Thai. The group of 15 people got in the vehicle and continued traveling for another three hours before arriving in Bangkok. B said that the vehicle stopped at a house in Bangkok or a suburb of Bangkok; she was not sure. Everyone had to hide in the house and they were not allowed to leave. B had to wait in the house for several days. While she was waiting in that house, several cars came to the house and picked some people up to send those people to different areas. Finally, it was B's turn. Another broker came to pick her up and took her to her sister's workplace. B said that in total, she spent three days coming to Bangkok, and three brokers helped her.

It is very difficult for undocumented migrant workers from Myanmar to travel back to their hometowns, especially workers who work in central Thailand. B has not traveled back to Dawei for several years because she did not want to pay the fee to the broker to send her back and she did not want to take any risks coming to Thailand again. In some instances, migrant workers get locked up in a house or a workplace. They cannot travel back to Myanmar, not even to visit their families in their hometowns. B's friend, for example, was confined to work in a house for months. B's friend had worked as a housemaid in a house at Lat Phrao. Similarly, B was working as a housemaid in another house in the same area.

B's employers were kind. They taught B the Thai language and treated B very well. Conversely, her friend's employer was very cruel. They did not even let her friend sleep in the house. They had her friend sleep in a doghouse. B told me that when she first met this friend, she was walking around her employer's house and she heard someone crying and speaking in

Burmese. She tried to find out who was crying. She found a teenage girl who was locked up in a house fence. B walked to the fence and started talking to that girl. The girl told B that she came from Dawei. She was sold by a broker to this family. She had to work for this family, but the family had never paid her. Moreover, if she did something wrong, the employer would abuse her by beating her and sometimes pouring hot water over her body. While B was talking with the girl about the abuse, the girl showed B wounds and scars on her body. The girl also said that the employer had never let her sleep in the house. She had to sleep in a dog cage. The girl asked for her salary, but the family became furious and poured bathroom cleaning liquid on her. Furthermore, even though the family would give her meals, they were not enough for her. The girl wanted to leave and go back to her hometown, but the family did not allow her to leave the house. B sympathized with the girl. She decided to tell the girl's story to a Thai woman who lived around that area. The woman, then, called the police to help the girl. The policemen came to investigate, question the friend, and waited until the employer came back. Finally, the employer was arrested and eventually convicted of assault, battery, and human trafficking. However, the employer knew some powerful policemen; therefore, he was set free shortly afterward.

Even though migrant worker abuse is not common nowadays, it is still happening in Thailand. Recent examples include the case of an employer who abused a Cambodian worker (Independent News Network, 2019) or a case of a Thai employer who used a Lao girl as a slave (Naewna, 2019; and Siamrath, 2019). The girl was sent back to Myanmar. She stayed in Myanmar for a while and then asked B to help her find some other jobs in Thailand. Since then, she has returned to Thailand, and she is working at a salon in Bangkok. She now has a passport

and a work permit. Therefore, it is not difficult for her to travel from Myanmar to Thailand or from Thailand to Myanmar anymore.

*Wah Khaing's story*

Wah Khaing used a different route to travel to the Mahachai area. Wah Khaing lived in Bago and came to Thailand about 12 years ago. She contacted a broker and told the broker that she wanted to come to work at her cousin's workplace. The broker asked her to pay 28,000 baht (930 dollars) as a fee. After negotiating the payment, the broker arranged to meet at a place at a certain time to travel to Thailand. Then, the broker came to pick her up. She traveled to Thailand by a big pick-up truck. There were 30-40 people in a truck. She said she did not know where she was heading and did not know what route the driver used. Sometimes she had to get out of the truck and walk for a day in the mountains. The broker gave her some food and drink. However, she did not drink it because she believed the broker put a drug in the water. She guessed that the drug was Methamphetamine. The drug would give migrant workers energy to walk in the mountain and escape from the immigration police. Most of the workers drank the water to give them energy. After walking for a day, she got into the truck again. She spent three days traveling to Thailand. She, finally, arrived at the workplace safely. Wah Khaing came to Thailand without any documentation. She worked in a factory that only gave her a little money. The employer did not allow her to apply for documentation because the employer wanted to control her. The employer wanted to pay her lower wages and did not want her to escape. She worked illegally. When the police came to inspect, she and the other undocumented workers had to run and hide from the police. If they could run away, they would not be arrested, but they also would not be

paid for that day. However, nowadays, Wah Khaing has a passport and a work permit since she changed her workplace to the furniture factory. Her employer applied for the documents and the work permit for her when the Thai government allowed undocumented migrant workers from Myanmar to register and receive a visa and work permit. She is now able to travel back and forth between Myanmar and Thailand legally. However, she does not usually travel back to her hometown due to the cost of traveling. She said if she travels to Bago, she has to pay at least 3,000 baht (about 100 dollars) for traveling because she travels by van. Therefore, even though her son is in Bago with her sister, she only returns to Bago once every two years.

#### *Current ways of traveling*

The stories illustrated earlier are the accounts of the trips made by undocumented workers from Myanmar 10-20 years ago. However, today migrant workers become documented more frequently. The documented migrant workers from Myanmar have different ways to travel back and forth between Myanmar and Thailand.

There are three different means to travel back and forth between Thailand and Myanmar for documented migrant workers from Myanmar. First, some migrant workers travel back to Myanmar by airplane. However, a flight ticket is costly. It is about 1,000-2,000 baht (about 30-65 dollars) for a one-way trip from Bangkok to Yangon. Therefore, migrant workers from Myanmar rarely go back to Myanmar by airplane. Only migrant workers who want to travel back to Myanmar urgently travel by airplane. Migrant workers from Myanmar prefer to go back to Myanmar by van, the second way to travel back to Myanmar. Migrant workers would call the van company and tell them the date that they want to travel. The van will then come and pick the

workers up at their residence. They need to pay the driver, and the driver will take them to their destination in Myanmar. The van will travel directly from the workers' residence to the workers' hometown. This means it is the most direct and convenient way to travel to Myanmar. The fee is about 550-1200 baht (about 18-40 dollars) for a one-way trip. Most migrant workers from Myanmar like to use this method of travel.

The cheapest way to travel to Myanmar is to use the bus to travel to Mae Sot and take the van to Myanmar. People who want to travel to Myanmar by bus can buy the bus ticket at the bus station at Mo Chit in Bangkok, or they can buy the ticket online through several websites. Moreover, there are different types of buses that people can choose to take. There are normal buses and VIP buses. There are around 40 seats in the normal bus and around 20-30 seats in the VIP bus. In the normal bus, there are four seats in a row, while there are only three seats in a row in the VIP bus. The price for the normal bus ticket is about 300 baht (about 10 dollars) and the VIP bus ticket is about 550 baht (about 18 dollars) one way. In order to experience the way to travel to Myanmar, I took a bus to Mae Sot and traveled to Myawaddi.

I decided to travel to Mae Sot through a bus from a transport company. I went to a website, [thaiticketmajor.com](http://thaiticketmajor.com), and searched for a bus ticket. There are several buses that go to Mae Sot in a day. I decided to go to Mae Sot at night, a trip that would take about 8-10 hours to Mae Sot. I bought the bus ticket online one week in advance. The bus tickets were nearly sold out. When I bought the bus ticket, there were only a few seats left on the VIP bus. There were no seats left on the normal bus. I, thus, had to travel to Mae Sot by the VIP bus. I paid 1,100 baht (about 36 dollars) for a round trip. At that time, I was worried that migrant workers might not be

taking the VIP bus. However, I had no choice; I had to travel by the VIP bus since the seats in the normal buses were unavailable for two weeks. Fortunately, the travelers on the bus I took were nearly all migrant workers from Myanmar.

At the bus station, VIP travelers can wait at the VIP room until the bus arrives. The bus that I took came at 10 pm. It departed at 10:30 pm and arrived at 7 am the next day. My seat was in the second row of the bus. Most of the travelers on the bus were people from Myanmar. There were some Thai people and a person from Laos on the bus. The people on the bus mostly played with their mobile phones, talked to each other, or slept. The roadway to Mae Sot is curvy. The bus stopped at the immigration station at Tak province before entering Mae Sot. At the immigration station, immigration police got into the bus and asked all passengers to show him their ID card or passport and their work permit. At this time, it made me confident that 90 percent of the passengers on the bus were migrant workers from Myanmar based on the documents they were preparing to show. Everyone prepared their ID documents except for a woman who sat in the front row of the bus. The woman did not prepare her document and asked the police whether she needed to show the ID card in the Thai language. The police said all passengers had to show the identity document. She had no choice; therefore, she took her document from her bag and gave it to the police. The police asked if the woman was from Laos. The woman said she was Lao. The police, then, said that the document was not correct because the document was not produced by the Thai government. Moreover, two documents were not related to each other. One document said that the woman worked in a company, and another one illustrated that she worked in another company. She was asked to leave the bus and remain at the immigration office. After everybody had been checked, the bus traveled to Mae Sot bus station.

After arriving at the Mae Sot bus station, some migrant workers just walked to other places, some took motor-tricycles to other places, and some took one of the minibuses to Myanmar. Each bus would go to different places in both Thailand and Myanmar. I took a taxi to the hotel and my friend came to pick me up to go to Myanmar.

Like the trip to Mae Sot, people who want to travel to Bangkok can buy the ticket online or at the bus station. The price, the bus, and the route are the same. However, for traveling to Bangkok, the bus and the passengers have to be checked several times at different immigration stations. Having passed those immigration stations, the passengers can then travel to Bangkok.

## **Conclusion**

Numerous researchers have shown that migrant workers' social networks play an important role in creating an ethnic segmentation and a division of labor. Migrant workers make use of personal contacts, social networks within neighborhoods, and social networks developed through friends, kin, nationality, and ethnicity to locate certain jobs in certain areas. Similarly, migrant workers from Myanmar significantly rely on their social networks to find jobs in Thailand. Wah Khaing, for instance, came to work in a furniture factory in the Mahachai area because of her sister's persuasion. Employers also utilize current workers' social contacts to recruit workers. Therefore, lots of migrant workers from Myanmar working in the Mahachai area have been recruited through their friends and family members who work in the area. However, social networks of migrant workers from Myanmar are not the only factors pushing migrant workers from Myanmar to work in the Mahachai area. Other reasons include geographical factors, social and cultural preferences, brokers, and accessibility.

Many migrant workers came to the Mahachai area because they thought that they could be socially and culturally safe while working in the Mahachai area, along with people who have similar cultures, religions, and traditions. However, working in this area is like a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the area can be a culturally-safe haven for migrant workers from Myanmar. On the other hand, working in this area stereotypes them as dangerous Burmese. The Mahachai area is the largest Burmese ethnic enclave in Thailand. As Burmese people are dangerous according to many native-born people's perspective, this area became known as a dangerous Myanmar town. The workers who work in this area are stereotyped as dangerous Burmese regardless of their ethnicity or nationality. Mahachai is a precarious place for migrant workers from Myanmar. Many Thai people create boundaries between themselves and migrant workers in this area. Bordering practices include exploitation, oppression, and ignorance. Many migrant workers from Myanmar are socially and economically exploited, regardless of any concern. Wah Khaing and her friends in the furniture factory, for example, have always been caught by the police officials and asked for bribes, even though they are legal migrant workers in Thailand. Tui Tui was oppressed and exploited by a Thai employer (NG Thai, 2019). She only received only half of her wage from the employer, and the employer abused her when she wanted to quit the job (NG Thai, 2019). Despite exploitations and oppression occurring repeatedly, many native-born people believe that migrant workers deserve to be exploited and oppressed. These native-born people, thus, decide to ignore these problems. Bordering practices become natural and performative. It becomes acceptable for native-born people and customary for migrant workers in the Mahachai area.

Their concentration in Samut Sakhon Province is just one reason that makes the workers viewed and treated as a dangerous Other. State actors also play important roles in constructing the image of migrant workers. In the next chapter, I will explain more about how and why migrant workers from Myanmar are constructed as a dangerous Other by state actors in Thailand.

#### **Chapter 4. What they are: a problem or a source of money**

The first duty of state governments is typically the state's security. In the past, according to Foucault, state security referred to the security of the territory. Currently, it also refers to the security of populations. Foucault (1977-1978) demonstrated that the task of towns or states is to be a perfect agent of circulation. Dangerous elements increase the insecurity of the state. Therefore, it is a matter to organize circulation by "eliminating its dangerous elements, making a division between good and bad circulation, maximizing the good circulation, and diminishing the bad" (1977-1978, 34). However, what is bad circulation? Foucault explained that bad circulations are risky and inconvenient elements, referring to either things or people. These risky elements come into the state and create a feeling of fear amongst the population. However, who has the power to decide the division between good and bad circulation, and why have they made these particular decisions? Are decisions made because the people or elements considered to be bad circulation creating problems in the state? Are there other reasons? These questions can connect to the case of migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand. Foucault's idea of good and bad circulation raises the question of whether migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand are considered to be bad circulations. If they are considered to be bad circulation, who determined that status and what influenced the decision to categorize them as such?

Migration is viewed as a crisis, a problem, and a threat. Some scholars see that it is a problem based on the discourse of fear (Hyndman, 2012). Some people explain that it is seen as a problem because migrants will create uncertainty in everyday life (Bigo, 2002). For them, migrants are unpredictable in their identity, culture, and actions. Therefore, migration can be

seen as causing unease to the state and its citizens. This unease has different forms. For example, the public unease can occur when migrants come to the state and take jobs from the citizens or when migrants come to the state and have the potential to commit crimes. In response to the public unease, homeland's politics, which can be called securitization of migration, emerge. The securitization of migration is "a transversal political technology," which is used as "a mode of governmentality by diverse institutions to play with unease" (Bigo, 2002, 65). However, there is a critique that, in reality, migration becomes a problem "not because there is a threat to the survival of society" but because "scenes from everyday life become politicized because day-to-day living is securitized" (Bigo, 2001, 100). In other words, securitization of migration causes migration to become viewed as a crisis to society. However, whether migration is a problem per se or if it is a problem due to its securitization, the securitization of migration is executed by those claiming to secure society from migration.

Recent studies have discussed the securitization of migration in relation to how refugees or migrants are viewed and treated. For example, Peter Nyers (2006) described refugees as people who lack place, nation-state and citizenship, people who are a political problem in need of a political and ethical solution, and people who are treated like animals. However, this concept generalizes how migrants are viewed and treated. Different actors have different ideas about migrants; different actors view and treat migrants differently. Therefore, we need to consider the perspectives of different actors. Didier Bigo (2002) categorized these actors into three groups: the state, politicians, and security professionals, and called them the managers of unease. He explained how the managers of unease see migrants differently; however, his research is based on the Western context. There are no studies that explain ways the managers of unease in

Thailand view things or how they treat migrant workers from Myanmar. Therefore, in this chapter, I will consider the perspectives and the management of the managers of unease in Thailand on migrant workers from Myanmar, specifically migrant workers from Myanmar in the Mahachai area.

Having done this research, I found that the status of migrant workers from Myanmar (either good or bad circulation) is decided by the Thai state (the managers of unease). The state in this study means the performative state; the Thai state in this study refers to all actors who have the power to manage uncertainty, which includes the central government, local governments, the population, immigrants, police officials, and different forms of social media. In this chapter, I illustrate the ways that the managers of unease manage migrant workers from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon Province. In doing so, I argue that migrant workers from Myanmar are continuously discussed as aliens who are sources of problems in Thailand, not because they actually create problems but because of the ways state actors view and manage them. The Thai state sees migrant workers from Myanmar as a social and security problem and as people who can be exploited and need to be organized. State actors have the power and authority to manage problems and people who create problems, allowing them to exploit migrant workers.

The chapter starts with the general concept of security and immigration. Then I explain some techniques of securitization of migration that have been widely discussed. In the third section, I explain the idea of managers of unease. Afterward, I demonstrate how Thai state actors mobilize security discourses against migrant workers from Myanmar in the Mahachai area. I also

explain how Thai state actors conceptualize migrant workers and what techniques and strategies they use to manage the unease.

### **Security and immigration**

Immigration has long been discussed in the field of geopolitics. Earlier, immigration had been discussed in relation to human displacement generated by war (Hyndman, 1997; 2012). However, after 9/11, the geopolitics of immigration discourses across space and over time has included the discourse of security problems, which linked insecurity to mobile bodies (Mountz, 2010). Immigration has become increasingly significant in the security discourse since the event of 9/11.

Immigration is viewed as a security problem (Bigo, 2002). Ayse Ceyhan (1997) claims that the increase in insecurity of the state has been attributed to the responsibility of immigrants and migrants. Therefore, the term “immigrant” becomes a way to designate someone as a threat to the core values of a country. There are two terminologies associated with immigrants. First, traditionally, immigrants are foreigners who do not hold the nationality of that state, which follows their legal status. Secondly, according to Bigo (2002) and Ericson (1999), immigrants are social representations of the “social distribution of bad”. In the discourse of security, we use the latter explanation of immigrants, rather than the former. Due to negative stereotypes associated with the definition of immigrants, immigrants are viewed as “outsiders, inside the state” (Bigo, 2002, 66). They are not us, but Others. Additionally, they are viewed as someone who will create threats to the survival of society. They are people who will generate population insecurity through their transformation of the insiders’ everyday life. Accordingly, they are

depicted as problems; the words immigrant and migrant connote signs of danger. The securitization of migration is, thus, required.

The securitization of migration is a process or an anticipatory action to manage the risk from immigrants, who are viewed as “the social distribution of bad”. There are a lot of techniques of securitization of migration, such as biopolitics (Foucault, 2003), stateless by geographical design (Mountz, 2010; 2011a; 2011b; 2012; 2015); border control (Amoore, 2006; Aday, 2009; and Mountz, 2010) and the management of humanitarian capital and aid (Hyndman, 1997; 2007; and Nyers, 2006). However, this chapter will focus on two techniques of securitization of migrants, which are surveillance and domopolitics.

### **Surveillance and domopolitics**

Transnational migrants have been the target of surveillance because they represent a threat and are signs of danger (Crampton, 2007). Therefore, at the border, the state attempts to regulate transnational migration. The state will define migrants into categories—the standard group or the risky group—by the time the migrants arrive on sovereign territory (Mountz, 2010, 25-26). The techniques and technologies of surveillance that states use to divide and manage migrants at the border mostly are based on biometric practices, data collection, and surveillance.

Surveillance is an important technique to manage state space and society. In the discourse of the securitization in capitalism, there is freedom of movement (Foucault, 2008). Therefore, even though surveillance is a technique of the state used to secure unpredictability, it also maintains the freedom of circulation. In other words, surveillance is a technique for maximizing good circulation and minimizing risk (Foucault, 1977-1978).

The principle of surveillance can connect to the idea of a panoptic and ban-optic mechanism (Foucault, 1977-1978). Panopticon is used to discipline the population and society, which is the foundation of the idea of surveillance. At any given time, not all populations will be imagined as threats. However, this distinction will be based on the persons who have the power to determine who is good or bad circulation. Those who are imagined as bad circulation will be under surveillance while those who are seen as good circulation will be free of surveillance, or influenced less by surveillance. This links to the idea of “ban-opticon”. As Bigo explained, the discipline form of postmodern societies is not a panopticon in which everybody is under surveillance “but a form of ban-opticon in which surveillance technologies sort out who needs to be under surveillance and who is free of surveillance, because of his profile” (2002, 82).

Drawing from the ideas of panopticon and ban-opticon, surveillance is a technique to manage society and to control the uncertainty from immigrants or any bad circulations.

Domopolitics has recently been described as the governmentality to manage good and bad circulations. Domopolitics was invented by William Walters (2004). Walters explains that “domopolitics aspires to govern the state like a home” (Walters, 2004, 237); “home is a place we must protect. We may invite guests into our home, but they come at our invitation; they do not stay indefinitely. Others are, by definition, uninvited” (Walters, 2004, 241). For dividing guests and others, migrants will be managed, sorted, and classified based upon past experience and probabilities of risk or the technologies of surveillance (Darling, 2011). Therefore, the borders of states function as “firewalls” or “antivirus software” (Walters, 2006), which scan the flow of information entering and leaving the system. Under the technologies of surveillance, the border is not a wall designed to arrest all movement but more of a filter that aspires to reconcile

movements with high levels of security (Walters, 2006, 152). However, a human is not data; therefore, this kind of surveillance and management is only partially effective. Undesirable people, such as undocumented migrants, are still able to find a way to come into the state.

### **Managers of unease**

A securitization of migration is a management process of unease, but the question is who runs this process? Who are the managers of unease? Bigo (2002) describes three groups of people as managers of unease: the state, politicians, and security professionals. Different managers of unease have different ways of conducting and managing problems.

For the state, migrants or immigrants are understood as being in opposition to citizens or nationals. Migration is understood as a danger to the homogeneity of the people because “migrants are framed through various cultural discourses as foreigners, or as citizens of a different national origin, who do not fit the 'national standard' of norms and values” (Bigo, 2002, 67). The state sees immigrants as a danger to the image of the state. Security of immigration is, thus, done to secure the image of the state and also peace and homogeneity in its sovereignty.

In terms of politicians, Bigo illustrated that practices of security are not given by nature but are the outcomes of political acts by politicians on threat management. Bigo also highlighted that the immigration problem is useful for politicians. The politicians manage the unease in order to justify their authority. It is a political game. Their objective is not just to try to organize the state and society, but also to safeguard their power.

Finally, the security professionals are groups of persons, agents, or private institutions who work on unease. They are the experts in managing and determining threats. They not only respond to threats but also identify what is and what is not a risk. They will classify things, people, and events into their risk categories and then provide a way to handle the risk. The security professionals generalize a threat and thereby encourage people to believe that this threat is more widespread than suspected. Afterward, the experts will offer amateurs the opportunity to invest in the institutional knowledge and a range of technologies suitable for responding to those threats. For them, immigration is immediately seen as a useful target for the use and experimentation of their technologies and encourage amateurs to buy them.

It can be seen that different actors conduct securitization of migration differently. They also play a significant role in creating the image of migration. Migration as a problem is, thus, a condition intentionally made by each party in order to run securitization of migration for their own purposes.

### **Who we are: the managers of unease in Thailand**

In the context of migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand, the managers of unease are different from what Bigo explained for several reasons. First, I agree with Bigo that the state is a manager of unease; however, the state, in this paper, is performative. Based on the idea of performativity, there is no self before the performance of self. Therefore, in terms of the state, there is no state before the performance of the state's actor. In other words, the state is conceptualized as an effect and a practice of thoughts, sayings, and actions, which is performed by state actors. The follow-up question is, who are the state actors? Mountz (2004, 325-326)

explained that the state is embodied by “fluid, daily and personal interactions” that surround and disrupt the formal instruments of governance, such as policy and structure. Therefore, state actors are those whose daily interactions surround the formal instruments of governance, and those who can organize and disrupt the formal instruments of governance. Therefore, state actors, in the case of migrant workers from Myanmar, are the central government (military government), local governments, media, social media, people in Thailand (regular Thai people and migrants themselves), and security professionals. These groups of people are significant actors who classify who belongs to Thailand and who are foreigners. They also identify what should be viewed as a problem or a threat. Significantly, they identify whether migrant workers from Myanmar are the problem or not and how to manage migrant workers if they are seen as a danger to the state. However, since the state is performative, none of the groups will have absolute power to manage migrant workers. On the contrary, the power of the state can be changed and disrupted based on the state actors’ performance in different situations. The livelihood of migrant workers, therefore, depends on the management of different state actors.

Secondly, Bigo illustrated that politicians are another manager of unease. However, because Thailand had been controlled by the military government from the coup d'etat in 2014, politicians have less power to manage issues in Thailand<sup>6</sup>. Although there was a national election

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<sup>6</sup> From May 22, 2014 (2014 Thai coup d'état) to July 10, 2019, Thailand was ruled by a military junta called The National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO). On May 22, 2014, the military declared martial law and forced the elected government out of the office. The Yingluck Shinawatra government was removed; the NCPO took control of the country. Prayut Chan-o-cha became the leader of the country. In 2018, Palang Pracharath Party which ties to the NCPO was established. This party was formed to prepare for the general election in 2019. Moreover, the NCPO has also changed some constitution to ensure that the NCPO would have control after election. Accordingly, even though Palang Pracharath Party came 2nd in the polls, Prayut Chan-o-cha were nominated as the prime minister of Thailand.

in March 2019, a new constitution ensured that the military would still have considerable control and Thai politicians did not need to expand their power. Thai politicians have little power under the current situation in Thailand unless they are chosen by the military government. Therefore, this migration problem is not something that Thai politicians can engage with much. They do not need to manage the unease in order to justify their authority. More importantly, they do not have the power to manage the unease. They cannot organize society or safeguard their power. Politicians, thus, are not the managers of unease in Thailand under the control of the military government. Even though there was an election in Thailand in 2019, the politicians still have less power to manage the migration issue since the government that was elected is still the military government.

Finally, according to Bigo, security professionals are another manager of unease. However, I see security professionals as a state actor whose performances also surround and disrupt the instruments of governance. Security professionals in Thailand are military personnel, especially immigration officials and police officers because they are the persons who have the most important roles in classifying things, people, and events into risk categories. They are also professionals in managing problems. They can take advantage of the problem and produce unease by using their power. Migrant workers from Myanmar, sometimes, are seen as a rich source of money for some immigration officials and police officers.

In the next section, based on my ethnographic research and interviews, I will illustrate how the state actors view and manage migrant workers from Myanmar in the Mahachai area.

**Who/what are they from the perspective of state actors?**

In order to understand how the Thai state views and manages migrant workers from Myanmar, in this section, I analyze how the Thai central government views migrant workers from Myanmar through the policies about migrant workers. The Thai government is a group of people who have established and disrupted policies; the policies, thus, reflect the Thai governments' perspectives in each period. In addition, I analyze how some Thai people view migrant workers from Myanmar by analyzing public social media, through my own experiences, and through interviews. At the same time, I analyze how the media and social media affect the general Thai population's view of migrant workers from Myanmar. Then, I discuss how local governments view and manage migrant workers from Myanmar. Finally, I explain how immigration officers and police officers view and treat migrant workers from Myanmar in the Mahachai area.

### **They are a security problem and a problem negatively affecting the image of state**

In the past, foreign migrant workers were viewed from two standpoints by previous Thai governments. On the one hand, they were required for the Thai economy and utility; they were needed to promote the economic security of the Thai state. On the other hand, they were seen as dangerous to Thai national security. Before 1947, foreign workers were seen as an important part of the Siam economy because the governments were trading and expanding their international relationships with other countries (National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, 2011). However, in 1947, the Thai military government, under the nationalist perspective, thought that migrant workers were a problem in relation to national security (National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, 2011). They tried to reduce the number of foreign workers and

restricted employment for foreigners. In order to protect the nation, the government launched policies to increase foreign taxes and classified foreign workers into two groups: skilled and unskilled workers (National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, 2011). The government only allowed skilled migrant workers (workers with specialized skills, training, and knowledge such as engineers, doctors, or translators) to work in Thailand. In contrast, unskilled migrant workers (workers with lower education and intellectual ability) were forbidden to work in Thailand (Archavanitkul, 2008).

In 1959, the priority for Thailand was the national economy (National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, 2011). The government thought that laws and policies restricting foreign workers were not appropriate to develop the national economy. Therefore, they decided to adjust the policies. The amendment of the policies was completed in 1972, which allowed migrant workers who had been working and living in Thailand for an extended period to have permanent work permits (National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, 2011). Additionally, the policies allowed new migrant workers to apply for a work permit in Thailand. Even though the government tried to improve the national economy, national security was still seen as important. The government selected only migrant workers who had knowledge and skills for particular jobs. Others were not allowed to work in Thailand. In 1978, stricter rules about migrant workers were executed since the government wanted to control migrant workers (National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, 2011). All migrant workers working in Thailand had to receive permission from the Department of Employment and receive a work permit. Moreover, foreign workers had to renew their permits every year; the government did not allow foreigners to apply for permanent work permits anymore. The government's execution was

successful only for foreign workers who met the criteria (skilled workers). For unskilled migrant workers, on the other hand, the government could not successfully control them. During this period, a lot of unskilled migrant workers were already working in Thailand illegally.

Accordingly, during this period, the government viewed unskilled migrant workers as a national security problem even though, in reality, these unskilled workers had already been secretly working in Thailand and had not created any problems. In an effort to eliminate unskilled workers and to protect the nation, many restrictions were launched. However, these restrictions only impelled unskilled migrant workers to seek illegal and secret means to work in Thailand more.

Around 1988, migrant workers from Myanmar became a significant part of Thailand's economy. As a consequence of an uprising in Myanmar in 1988, numerous people fled from Myanmar to Thailand to seek asylum and work (Archavanitkul, 2008). A large number of people from Myanmar moved to Thailand and worked in the unskilled labor force. However, this event did not become a big national security problem in Thailand. In that period, the economic situation in Thailand required numerous low-wage laborers, especially in the construction sector and fishing industry, in order to advance the national economy. Therefore, the economic situation forced the Thai government to accept migrant workers from Myanmar to work in Thailand as unskilled laborers in the fishing and construction sectors in Thailand. To support the national economy, the government allowed migrant workers to work as unskilled workers in Thailand for the first time in 1993 (Council of Ministers of Thailand, 1993; and Archavanitkul, 2008). However, those workers were confined to areas where they could live and work (Archavanitkul, 2008; and the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, 2011). The

government only allowed migrant workers to stay and work in the area they were registered. They could not travel to other provinces. Moreover, not all provinces would be open for migrant workers to register to work (National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, 2011). Even though the government would allow migrant workers to register and work in Thailand legally, many were unregistered because the process of registration was too difficult and complicated for the workers. The government failed to organize migrant workers at that time.

After allowing migrant workers to work as unskilled laborers in Thailand, the number of migrant workers from Myanmar dramatically increased. The government started viewing these workers as a reason for concern. Therefore, since 1996, the government tried to find a way to make migrant workers register (Labour Rights Promotion Network Foundation, 2011), such as organizing periodic campaigns for undocumented migrants from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos to register and apply for a work permit without penalty (Labour Rights Promotion Network Foundation, 2011). The government also reduced the cost of registration and allowed migrant workers to register to work in forty-three provinces (National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, 2011). However, the process of registration was still complicated. Moreover, the policies about registration had changed several times, making it more difficult for migrant workers to understand the process. Additionally, some migrant workers did not know about the campaigns. The government's attempt failed (again) to make undocumented migrant workers register as documented migrant workers.

From 1988-2006, the central government viewed migrant workers as a significant source of labor but was still worried about national security. They, thus, classified migrant workers to

either desirable or undesirable workers through a registration process. Unregistered or undesirable migrants do not refer to migrants who are creating problems; they are unregistered because of the difficulty of the registration process. It is the securitization of migration (registration process) that classifies migrants into either desirable documented workers or problems.

From 2006 to 2014, the government became more concerned about national security. They tried to control and organize migrant workers from Myanmar by two means (Department of Employment, Thailand, 2012; 2013; 2014). First, they began to arrest undocumented migrant workers in large numbers (Labour Rights Promotion Network Foundation, 2011). They established laws to impose fines and penalties for undocumented workers in Thailand and employers who hired those undocumented workers. The second method was an attempt to organize migrant workers from Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU allowed workers from those countries to work in Thailand through the registration process of the two countries (Ministry of Labour, Thailand, 2018). This process helped the Thai government identify the workers. The workers had to prove their identity from their home country and receive their identity documents before coming to Thailand. Therefore, it was a process to help the Thai government scan those who would enter Thailand from those countries.

However, according to the MOU process, current migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand had to go back to their home country and apply for their identity documents (Ministry of Labour, Thailand, 2018). This process was time-consuming and expensive. Moreover, not all

migrant workers from Myanmar would be able to identify themselves with the Burmese government since they are an ethnic minority in Myanmar. Therefore, they might not be able to receive any identity documents for working in Thailand. Many migrant workers from Myanmar, thus, continued to work unregistered. Apart from that, the government also specified the types of work for the workers from Myanmar. Jobs that required skills and knowledge would be reserved for Thai people (Archavanitkul, 2008). Since 1993, the government's security discourse and perspective had changed; the determination of desirable and undesirable migrants had changed too. In the past, unskilled migrant workers were determined as undesirable workers and could not come to work in Thailand. However, after 1993, the Thai economy needed more manual labor and the government wanted to reserve higher-level jobs for Thai people. Unskilled migrant workers, therefore, have been allowed to come and work in Thailand while skilled migrant workers have been restricted and seen as undesirable migrants instead. It can be seen that the government determines which workers are categorized as desirable and undesirable.

Migrant workers from Myanmar became a significant issue in Thailand in 2015. After the 2014 coup, the Thai military government was in the public eye. The government, thus, became highly concerned about the image of the state. Migrant workers from Myanmar became a big problem when well-known foreign news agencies, such as the *Washington Post*, the *Guardian* (2015), and the *Radio-Canada* (2015), reported about the slave labor in Thailand, primarily in the shrimp processing industries in Samut Sakhon Province. The *Washington Post*, for example, reported that Thailand is "home to nearly half a million enslaved workers, and specifically cites the shrimp industry as a leading contributor" (Ferdman, 2015). The *Washington Post* persuaded readers not to eat shrimps from Thailand by titling their article, "Don't eat that shrimp" and

quoting Aidan McQuade, director of Anti-Slavery International, “If you buy prawns or shrimp from Thailand, you will be buying the produce of slave labor.” These articles on slave labor in the shrimp industries in Thailand made the image of Thailand decline. To secure the image of the state, the Thai government felt that the problem needed to be solved.

At the same time that the report and the news were revealed, Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report 2015 listed Thailand into Tier 3<sup>7</sup> (Department of State, United States of America, 2015). Therefore, the image of the state and the government was largely negative at this time. The government attempted to improve its ranking. Accordingly, migrant workers from Myanmar became a significant problem to solve for the Thai government. The issue of migrant workers and human trafficking was announced by the government to be a national agenda that required preventive measures immediately.

The government, thus, made significant efforts to eliminate the undocumented migrant workers by organizing one-stop service centers for migrant workers to register since 2014. The government also launched policies related to severe punishment in 2017 (Kerdmongkol, 2017). The policies indicated that undocumented workers would be arrested immediately and sent to jail if they were located. Moreover, employers who hire undocumented workers will be fined 400,000-800,000 baht (about 13,330-26,660 dollars) per undocumented worker. The government

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<sup>7</sup> The Trafficking in Persons Report is an annual report issued by the U.S. State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. It ranks governments into Tier 1-3 based on their efforts to prevent and eliminate human trafficking under Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA). According to the TIP Report, Tier 1 refers to the countries whose governments fully comply with the TVPA's minimum standards. Tier 2 and Tier 2 Watch List refer to Countries whose governments do not fully comply with the TVPA's minimum standards, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards. Tier 3 refers to Countries whose governments do not fully comply with the minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so. In 2015, Thailand was ranked in Tier 3 which is the worst Tier. Thailand could improve their rank to Tier 2 in 2018.

gave employers and migrant workers 60 days to make everything legal. In 2017, the TIP Report listed Thailand in the Tier 2 Watch List, and since 2018, Thailand is Tier 2 in the Trafficking in Persons Report in 2018.

The two issues show that the Thai government is highly concerned about the international image of the state and the government. Previously, the Thai government had already viewed migrant workers from Myanmar as a security problem but they did not make much effort to resolve the problem. However, when the issue became a problem for the image of the state and the government, the government started to become more concerned about the issue, making the issue a priority problem to be solved (Independent News Network, 2018). As a result of their attempts, they successfully reached their goal; they were able to secure the image of the state and the government.

The issues also illustrate the interaction of several actors in managing migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand. In this case, even though they are not equally active, they are interactive. The state actors are not just the central government but also include international organizations, international publications, and international news and media. International organizations, publications, news, and media depicted undocumented migrant workers in Samut Sakhon Province as helpless victims who were forced to be laborers in the seafood factories. Thailand became a country of human trafficking. By creating this image of Thailand, the military government was forced to address the issue based on what the international agents wanted it to be. The state as a performative effect materialized through the practices of these agents; the

condition of migrant workers from Myanmar were governed not only by the Thai central government but also shaped by international media.

The Thai central government has been using several strategies to manage migrant workers from Myanmar. Some techniques and strategies can be linked to the idea of domopolitics and surveillance. Based on domopolitics, the Thai government launched numerous policies to classify and control all migrants who want to come into Thailand. Migrant workers who can identify themselves, who hold passports or have documents of identification and a work permit, can enter Thailand legally, while others are unwelcomed. However, numerous migrant workers could practically escape the central government's policies by using several methods such as paying bribes or illegally entering Thailand. Therefore, the central government has to use another technique to check and govern migrant workers from Myanmar. This technique is surveillance.

The central government mandates that local governments inspect whether there are undocumented migrant workers in the areas. Even though undocumented migrant workers were seen as a security problem by the central government, many local government officials did not rigidly check migrant workers. Some local government officials allowed undocumented migrant workers to stay and work in Thailand if the migrant workers could pay bribes. However, after the image of the state was ruined in 2015, the central government became serious about restoring the image of the Thai state. Many local government officials who did not follow the policies and who accepted bribes were, thus, terminated or transferred. Areas where numerous migrant workers from Myanmar reside, such as the Mahachai area, were strictly inspected by local

government officials. As a result, the number of undocumented migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand declined. However, there are still undocumented migrant workers and there are still many local government officials who do not follow the policies launched by the central government, such as in the Mahachai area.

Even though the image of migrant workers from Myanmar is determined by the Thai central government and, in particular cases, by state actors outside of the state, such as international media and reports, the state also includes other state actors. Some populations, media outlets, and social networks are also significant state actors whose daily interactions surround and disrupt the formal instruments of governance.

### **They are people coming to seize my country**

In terms of how people in Thailand manage migrant workers from Myanmar, I divide the population into four groups: Thai people who have no experience with migrant workers from Myanmar, Thai people who interact with migrant workers from Myanmar, Thai people who can take advantage of workers from Myanmar, and migrant workers from Myanmar themselves. For the first three groups, we cannot describe how the general Thai population views and manages migrant workers from Myanmar without analyzing news, the media, and social media in Thailand. News and media play a significant role in creating the image of migrant workers from Myanmar. At the same time, social media is a medium reflecting many Thai people's perspectives about various issues. Therefore, I will analyze how the Thai population views and manages migrant workers from Myanmar together with the role of news, media, and social

media (specifically *YouTube*, *Facebook*, and *Pantip* website) in depicting and responding to the issues about migrant workers from Myanmar.

Most Thai people have not had direct experiences with migrant workers from Myanmar. Some of them might have encountered migrant workers from Myanmar during their daily life, but they do not recognize them as migrant workers from Myanmar. However, most of them judge migrant workers from Myanmar from what they have heard and viewed on the news, other media, and from other people's speech. They discriminate against migrant workers from Myanmar due to their ignorance. Most of the Thai people I met, interviewed, and read their comments on social media, view migrant workers as dangerous and untrustworthy because these images are depicted and perpetuated in the news and media. For instance, on *BEC-Tero news*<sup>8</sup> posted on *YouTube* about Thai migrant workers from Myanmar killing their employers on November 17th, 2014, comments from the viewers of this news mostly states that migrant workers from Myanmar are cruel (BEC-Tero, 2014). One viewer said that the people from Myanmar are "truly hell animals. They never appreciated Thailand's kindness that let them stay. It is true that they are low-waged, but look at what they did!! Fire them and let them all get out of the country, all of them." Another comment said, "call this vicious, vicious nation." Evidently, migrant workers from Myanmar are seen as universally bad and murderers by viewers who can be described as "national aristocrats" or "the ones who are nationals and behave nationally because they are born nationals" (Hage, 1995, 467). National aristocrats in Thailand refer to people who are born national and claim their national rights to control and manage people and

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<sup>8</sup> The BEC-Tero is an entertainment conglomerate in Thailand that organizes and produces film and television shows.

issues in Thailand. The key concept of national aristocracy is being born national. Therefore, even though migrant workers can accumulate nationality by acquiring the language, mastering cultural practices and obtaining citizenship, they cannot be national aristocrats because they do not have a certain amount of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) by being born to a cultural group or a class. They, therefore, are differentiated from the national aristocrats. National aristocrats also refer to those who assume that “it is their national right to take up the position of governmentality within the nation and become national managers” (Hage, 2000, 62).

Similarly, these Thai people see themselves as people who have the right to decide who should be in the country and who should not. News agencies often choose to present the negative habits of some workers from Myanmar. It is rare to find good news about migrant workers from Myanmar. Therefore, most of the Thai national aristocrats repeatedly receive this perspective through news and other forms of media. Some of them, thus, view migrant workers from Myanmar as bad and dangerous people. Some of them view naturalized migrant workers from Myanmar as “objects” (Kristeva, 1982) or those who are disturbing identity, system, and order in the nation.

Moreover, many Thai people who have not had direct experiences with migrant workers from Myanmar view migrant workers as a group of people who will come and seize Thailand. I first heard about this perspective when I was attending a meeting about how to improve education for migrant children organized by the Labor Rights Promotion and Network (LPN) in 2016. An educator in the meeting asked to the director of the LPN, “Do you have any way to protect against migrant workers from Myanmar coming in and seizing the country?” He also

stated that “the number of migrant workers from Myanmar is increasing every year, and they are coming to occupy Thailand.” This educator had the opinion that Thailand will be seized by migrant workers from Myanmar. Furthermore, I found countless comments on social media about how migrant workers from Myanmar are coming to seize Thailand. Some examples of these kinds of comments can be found in *Pantip* and *Facebook*, the two most popular public media websites that Thai people (regardless of gender, age, class, and education) are using in Thailand (Pantip, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; Drama-Addict, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; Labour Rights Promotion Network, 2016 and Chaiprasith, 2016; and Mono 29, 2016). The majority of Thai people without direct experience with migrant workers from Myanmar that I met, interviewed, and whose comments I read, also think that migrant workers from Myanmar do not deserve equal human and labor rights as Thai workers. (Pantip, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; Drama-Addict, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; Labour Rights Promotion Network, 2016; and Chaiprasith, 2016). Human and labor rights that migrant workers from Myanmar need are the right to receive the minimum wage as it is written in the law, the right to travel to other provinces, and the right to use public health and receive education. Two of these requirements were approved by the government; only the right to travel remains limited. However, some national aristocrats disagree to give migrant workers these rights.

However, on the same social media, topics, and websites, there were some Thai people who understood and had sympathy for migrant workers from Myanmar (Pantip, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; Drama-Addict, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; Labour Rights Promotion Network, 2016; and Chaiprasith, 2016). Some of them disagreed with other national aristocrats who blamed migrant

workers from Myanmar. However, these comments were rare in the social media that I researched.

Thai people with direct experiences with migrant workers from Myanmar that I interviewed, such as co-workers and neighbors, had different and complicated and mixed views on migrant workers from Myanmar. On the one hand, they think that migrant workers from Myanmar are similar to Thai people, but more pitiful. On the other hand, they think that migrant workers from Myanmar are dirty, and they often act as if migrant workers from Myanmar are inferior to them. From the informal interviews with some Thai workers in the furniture factory, they said that migrant workers from Myanmar are similar to Thai people. Some of them explained that they understand migrant workers from Myanmar because these workers worked very hard to come here. Migrant workers from Myanmar are often treated very badly by other people in Thailand. They are often asked for bribes by police officers. Therefore, they have sympathy for migrant workers.

However, they also often mentioned that migrant workers are dirty and Burmese foods are inedible. For example, one of the Thai workers in the factory explained that for her, “they (migrant workers from Myanmar) are similar to Thai people. Their culture is similar to Thai. They are Buddhist; same as me. Mostly we behave similarly.” This Thai worker tried to explain to me that she and the migrant workers are not different. However, I followed up on her explanation by asking whether she had had any Burmese food with the migrant workers. She then laughed and explained that Burmese food is inedible; “the food is oily and their pickled fish is very smelly. When I went to my Burmese friend’s room, I really could not stand the smell. I

had to use two electric fans to blow the smell.” She also asked me, “I saw you eat some Burmese food with them; how do you dare to consume it? Aren’t you afraid of having diarrhea?” She was not the first person who was surprised to learn that I sometimes ate Burmese food. I was told not to accept Burmese food from migrant workers from Myanmar by the Thai workers in the factory because it is dirty and it might cause me to have diarrhea. I also kept asking her about migrant workers from Myanmar and about what migrant workers eat. The Thai worker, in the last part of the conversation, informed me that migrant workers from Myanmar like eating betel nuts, especially the male workers. She said:

I don’t like it (having betel nut). It makes the factory dirty. It also makes them look dirty, not pretty. Having betel nuts will make their mouth and teeth red; it looks ugly. When they have betel nuts, they have to spit the betel nut out. In the past, they spat it out everywhere in the factory. It was very dirty. The factory had to organize a meeting about having betel nuts and ordered the Burmese workers to find a way not to make the factory dirty. They, thus, now have to go and spit it in the toilet. It is not dirty now, but the Burmese workers still have betel nuts.

Apart from that, migrant workers from Myanmar in the furniture factory are treated as if they are inferior to the Thai workers. Most of the Thai workers in the furniture factory I interviewed often said that migrant workers from Myanmar and Thai workers are the same in terms of culture and humanity. Their speech sounds like they do not look down upon migrant workers from Myanmar; however, their actions differ from what they have said. They treat migrant workers from Myanmar as inferiors. Female Thai workers in the department of packing,

for example, do not call migrant workers from Myanmar by their name. Rather, they call the migrant workers from Myanmar by their physical appearance.

Moreover, the Thai workers often like to command the workers from Myanmar; they often order the migrant workers to work even though the Thai workers have no right to order the migrant workers because they are in the same positions. These Thai workers in the furniture factory enacted themselves as national aristocrats; they acted as if they are (factory) managers because they are born nationals. They feel that they have the right to manage the migrant workers from Myanmar in the factory. Therefore, even though many Thai workers in the furniture factory would say that Thai workers and migrant workers from Myanmar are the same, through their actions migrant workers from Myanmar are looked down upon and overly blamed.

For many Thai people who can take advantage of migrant workers from Myanmar, such as employers, they do not view migrant workers from Myanmar differently from Thai workers. The employers, as I have interviewed and experienced, see both their migrant workers and Thai workers as labor to exploit in a capitalist sense. They see that the workers have to work as much as they can to produce the greatest profit. The workers usually work more than eight hours a day because they have to work overtime to produce the products on time. The workers are treated as machines unable to converse with each other and restricted to work at all times. They cannot stop or take a rest; they have to work all day. They cannot have a snack; they can only drink water during their work time. They can go to the restroom but just for a short period of time. If they are sick, they will be asked whether they can continue working or not. If they can continue working, they have to work; but if they cannot, they can go home but they will not be paid for that day.

Thai workers and migrant workers from Myanmar in the warehouse are treated equally and paid equally. The employers do not treat them differently.

Evidently, Thai citizens have the power to manage migrant workers. However, compared to the central government, the population has less power to manage migrant workers. The Thai population cannot directly create the laws or manage migrant workers. However, they indirectly enforce the laws through the discourse of migrant workers from Myanmar via different channels such as *Facebook*, *Pantip*, or the news. The discourse constructed by Thai citizens become so commonplace it feels natural. This discourse is not only instilled in Thai people's minds, but also into the minds of migrant workers from Myanmar. This is so prevalent that many migrant workers from Myanmar think that they are indeed inferior to Thai people. They cannot behave normally; they behave how they are perceived by Thai people and the central government. Even though they are exploited, their sense of inferiority and powerless leads them to avoid being a cause of unease. This leads to a new kind of policing: self-governance

Migrant workers from Myanmar self-govern themselves in order to be able to work in Thailand peacefully. According to the interviews with the migrant workers from Myanmar in the furniture factory, many migrant workers do not want to create or have any problems. Even though some workers are exploited by local officials, employers, or the police, they decide to allow those people to exploit them. Many migrant workers I have interviewed think that if they create unease, they would be sent back to Myanmar. This is also supported by Samut Sakhon's Immigration Director. He explained that migrant workers from Myanmar usually self-manage themselves to be good migrant workers because they want to stay in Thailand. Most of them do

not involve themselves with problems and are not a source of problem like how many Thai people believe. In fact, many of the documented migrant workers also behave like the undocumented migrant workers by being inconspicuous in the workplace area and only going to places where there would not be police that might inspect them. They try to hide from the police and work peacefully in Thailand.

Three ways of policing are interrelatedly creating migrant worker's economic and social precarity. These policing methods are the central government's security apparatus, the discourse of migrant workers from Myanmar constructed by Thai citizens, and migrant workers' self-governance. These methods also lead to a new kind of policing (or exploitation) by new agents, local government officials, police officials, and immigration officials. These actors take actions from the central government's security apparatus and the discourse of migrant workers to manage migrant workers from Myanmar and, sometimes, to exploit migrant workers from Myanmar.

### **They are people who need help from our exploitation**

Local government officials are another significant (state) agent when it comes to managing and controlling migrant workers from Myanmar. Sometimes the local governments follow what the central government plans; however, sometimes, the local governments have their own views and do not act according to what the central government orders. There are different local official institutions involved in the process of managing, controlling, and helping migrant workers from Myanmar. In this part, I only disclose the perspectives of some local government officials who have the power to manage migrant workers from Myanmar. I received information from

interviews with those local government officials, interviews with migrant workers from Myanmar who have experience dealing with the local government officials, and my own experiences with local government officials.

I found that some local government officials see migrant workers from Myanmar as a social problem and the government's burden. Some of them think that there are too many migrant workers from Myanmar in the Mahachai area and this makes the Mahachai area less appealing. Moreover, they think that migrant workers from Myanmar produce social problems such as dirtiness or health problems. It is very costly for the Thai government to address these problems. The chair of Samut Sakhon's Provincial Labor Office, Nirat Thakunlabut, expressed his concerns in this way:

Migrant workers living in Mahachai make the area too crowded. I want the migrant population to be reduced by half. I want the production sector to reduce the number of their migrant laborers. They (referring to migrant workers from Myanmar) create problems, and the government has to be responsible for these problems such as health problems and dirtiness problems. The government has to spend a lot of money dealing with these problems. Therefore, if the number of migrant laborers can be reduced, the expenses that the government has to pay for managing the problems will reduce too. And the Mahachai will be more livable because now it is too crowded...

Because migrant workers from Myanmar are viewed as a group of people who produce social problems, some local officials in the Mahachai area also see migrant workers from Myanmar as people who need help and proper management. Similar to Bigo explaining that the

politicians manage the unease in order to justify their authority and to safeguard their power, some local Thai officials view themselves as people who have the power to help (manage) migrant workers from Myanmar. They think that they are important for migrant workers. For example, in terms of public health, cleanliness and exploitation, the chair of Samut Sakhon's Provincial Labor Office explained that:

Migrant workers have some weaknesses. For example, in terms of cleanliness, they are not like us. They throw rubbish everywhere. They chew betel nuts and spit them out everywhere. We need to help them. We need to inspect their residences. They live crowded in the residential area. They are exploited by the employer and the owner of the residence. Their community is too crowded. It is unsanitary. They need us to help. Our institution, thus, tries to organize their residence. We try to suggest a better residence for migrant workers and to the employers. We try to teach them about being more hygienic. We want migrant workers to complain so we can help. However, few migrant workers come to see us and complain. Undocumented workers do not come to see us. Therefore, we cannot help. They remain exploited. Legislatively, we need to help all workers even though they are undocumented. But if they do not come to see us, we cannot help. Our institution is disreputable. We have to inspect the factory and the residence to help them.

This idea is echoed by a member of the Provincial Council, Samut Sakhon Province:

If they entered Thailand illegally, their residence and their toilet are not in good condition. It will be very dirty because they don't know how to clean it. They don't

know how to deal with rubbish. There must be someone to teach them how to clean and how to manage the garbage. We need to help to teach them. Health and germs are other problems. When they move to Thailand, some of them might carry malaria with them and if they are undocumented workers, they would just hide themselves in the factory and this will be a problem. But if we make them legal, they will be screened; they will be checked up to see whether they have germs or not. This will help them and others. They will be safe. Therefore, we need to make them register to be able to manage and help them.

The chair of Samut Sakhon's Provincial Labor Office and the member of the Provincial Council want to manage migrant workers and make migrant workers legal or become "good circulations" in Thailand. For the chair of Samut Sakhon's Provincial Labor Office, if he can manage migrant workers from Myanmar, he can create a good reputation for the institution. He can maintain his power in the institution. The problem of migrant workers from Myanmar is useful for him to maintain his power and his position.

Another perspective of some local officials about migrant workers from Myanmar is that migrant workers from Myanmar are a group of people whom they can take advantage of. This perspective was not revealed through interviews but from local officials' actions such as the officials in the department of employment in Samut Sakhon Province. Some officials in the department of employment in Samut Sakhon Province receive bribes from the brokers to help migrant workers who do not have documents to change their work. According to the law, if the workers want to change their work, they have to have a letter from their previous employer

(Office of the Council of State, 2017). However, most of the workers change jobs without any permission from the previous employer. Therefore, legally, the officials at the department of employment would not be able to produce new work permits for these workers, yet many migrant workers from Myanmar are still able to get new work permits. According to an interview with the manager of the furniture factory, these migrant workers pay bribes to officials for help. These officials use their authority and function to make money illegally even though their duty is to execute the law. In this case, migrant workers from Myanmar are not a source of problems; they are victims of corruption. By using the central government's security discourse and constructing the migrant workers as illegal aliens, migrant workers can be exploited by corrupt officials.

What are the techniques that local officials use to manage these migrant workers? First, local officials use inspection and surveillance. The officials at Samut Sakhon's Provincial Labor Office often gather together with officials from other offices within the province, such as the Provincial Office, Police Department, and the Department of Employment. Together they visit migrant workers' residential areas or migrant workers' workplaces to inspect. The officials try to exploit and organize migrant workers' life by claiming that they need help; their residences are too dirty and unsanitary. After inspection, the officials will use their authority to change or adjust migrant workers' life through regular surveillance. In order to secure the environment of Mahachai and make the area more appealing, migrant workers from Myanmar are taught how to be clean and how to make everything sanitary. These techniques organized by the local government recreate the image of migrant workers as a problem that requires management. This

image can help the local government officials maintain their power, improve the reputation of the institution, and gain some individual financial benefits.

### **They are our ATM**

Security professionals such as immigration officials and police officers are the experts in managing and determining threats. They are a group of people who try to classify migrant workers into two groups: migrant workers who can stay and work in Thailand and migrant workers who cannot stay and work in Thailand. They classify migrant workers by inspection and checking the migrant workers' documents. If the police or the immigration officers find that those workers do not hold correct work permits or identity documents, they will arrest those workers and send them back to their hometowns in Myanmar. However, rather than preventing risk, some security professionals try to take advantage of the unease producers or people who relate to the unease producers, such as the employers. Therefore, migrant workers from Myanmar and employers, sometimes, are seen as a rich source of money for some immigration officers and police officials.

Mainly, the immigration officers and the police officers view migrant workers from Myanmar as a group of people whom they must manage since there are a lot of migrant workers from Myanmar in the area. According to my interviews, the director of the immigration office of Samut Sakhon Province and the director of a criminal investigation section of Samut Sakhon Province see migrant workers from Myanmar as a social problem in terms of the increasing number of migrant workers in the Mahachai area. They think migrant workers are a burden to the

state. Therefore, the immigration officers and the police officers must regularly inspect. Their goal is to reduce the number of illegal migrant workers in the area.

There is another viewpoint not expressed in the interviews with the police officers and immigration officers, and that is the viewpoint of migrant workers from Myanmar as a group of people being taken advantage of. This view was disclosed through the migrant workers and the factory owners' stories. The migrant workers from Myanmar explained how it is not uncommon for them to be asked for bribes from police officers in the city. Sometimes when they go to the market on Sundays, they are questioned by the police. The police asked them to show their identity documents and their work permits. Even though they would have all the documents, the police would also request them to show them the receipts, such as the work permit fee's receipt. Some migrant workers from Myanmar do not know what kind of receipt the police want or they do not have it with them. Therefore, the police will threaten to arrest them. Alternatively, the migrant workers can pay 1,000 baht (about 30 dollars) if they do not want to be arrested. The migrant workers from Myanmar do not want to make trouble for themselves, therefore, most of them pay those bribes if given that option. Wah Khaing, a Mon worker in the furniture factory, shared her experience in this way:

In the past, when I did not have a work permit, I was called by the police officials many times, but I was never arrested because all of them asked me to pay bribes. So, I paid them. But now, I have everything. If they ask, I can show them. And I can speak Thai, so I am not afraid of the police officers anymore.

However, even though Wah Khaing would say that she is not afraid of the police officers, she would rather avoid the police officers than encounter them. She has been staying in the Mahachai area for many years. She knows where the police officials hide and wait for migrant workers to come. Therefore, she does not go to those places. For example, the police officials usually come to inspect at the Mahachai Market, therefore, Wah Khaing rarely goes to the Mahachai market. Instead, she usually goes to the Mahachainiwet Market (or called by migrant workers from Myanmar as Newit Market), even though the Mahachai Market is closer and bigger. According to her story, migrant workers from Myanmar are often viewed as a source of money or a mobile ATM for some police officers. This idea is often repeated by some Thai people in the Mahachai area.

Some immigration officials ask bribes from the employers instead of asking bribes from migrant workers themselves. The owner of a textile factory in the Mahachai area told me that she paid around 4,000 baht (about 130 dollars) every month to an immigration official for years. This process of paying bribes started when a group of immigration officers came to her factory. The immigration officers wanted to inspect the factory and check all documents. However, some of her migrant workers from Myanmar did not have the documents and work permits. Some were new workers. Some were minorities in Myanmar who could not receive identification documents from the Burmese government. Therefore, the immigration officers told her that she was operating illegally. She hired undocumented workers and she had to pay a fine. She said she could not remember how much the fine was but it was a lot. However, an immigration official on the team told her that if she paid 4,000 baht every month, she did not need to pay the fine. Moreover, the officer would protect her from other immigration teams if those teams came to

inspect her factory. To protect her factory and her workers, she decided to pay the immigration officer 4,000 baht every month.

The owner of the textile factory also explained, “I do not only pay bribes to the immigration officers, but I also pay to the police too.” In a similar situation, a group of police came to her factory to inspect. Because she was hiring undocumented workers, she had to pay a fine. However, a police officer, the head of the group, asked whether she wanted to pay them every month. She then negotiated a price with the police officer. The police officer asked for 1,000 baht (around 30 dollars) a month. So, she decided to pay. Therefore, now the owner of the textile factory is paying 1,000 baht to the police officer and 4,000 baht to the immigration officer every month.

After the image of the state and the government had been destroyed by the issue of human trafficking and child labor in the Mahachai area in 2015, Prayut Chan-o-cha, the Prime Minister of Thailand, declared the issue of human trafficking as an important problem to be solved immediately. Since then, police officers and immigration officers have been more serious about addressing these problems. As explained by the owner of the textile factory:

Now the police and the immigration officials want to be successful; they are very serious about checking the factory. They might not accept bribes so I have to make documents for all of my workers.

Even though some immigration officials and police officials have stopped accepting bribes and are rigidly doing their duty, some continue to take advantage of migrant workers from Myanmar and employers. My migrant friends in the furniture factory are still being asked for

1,000 baht when they meet police officers, and the owner of the textile factory is still paying 1,000 baht to the police officer and 4,000 baht to the immigration officer. Migrant workers from Myanmar and their employers are still a source of money for some police officials and immigration officers. The operation and plan to improve the government's image has the potential to operate successfully. However, in reality, this operation cannot entirely stop the corruption.

According to the idea of domopolitics, the immigration officers and police officers have to classify who can stay and work in Thailand and who cannot by checking migrant workers' identity documents and work permits. However, the idea of domopolitics has some limitations. Domopolitics reflects the politics viewed from the central government in the western context, which cannot absolutely illustrate the real situation in some countries in Southeast Asia where corruption is a part of the society. Practically, in the case of Thailand, the immigration officers and police officers allow all migrant workers to stay in Thailand if the migrant workers pay them bribes. The management of Thai police officials and immigration officials shows a new kind of policing, which is not just to manage the unease but to take advantage of migrant workers and employers. The police officials and immigration officials use laws created by the central government and the discourse of migrant workers from Myanmar constructed by the Thai population to support their corruption. The police officials, local government officials, and immigration officials are the actors who can directly manage migrant workers from Myanmar in reality. Therefore, it is easy for them to take advantage of using their power. The securitization of migration, such as inspection, is a technique for these actors to find some extra money rather than to properly manage migrant workers.

## Conclusion

In Thailand, those who have the power to manage migrant workers from Myanmar are the Thai state. The Thai state, in this case, is performative. It is a performative effect of the state actors' practices. The state actors, in this paper, are the central government (military government), local governments, media, social media, regular Thai citizens, and security professionals. These state actors have the power to organize and disrupt the formal instruments of governance. They have the power to manage migrant workers from Myanmar; however, their management is being used differently. Some use their power to manage migrant workers directly, some use their power to construct/reconstruct the image of migrant workers from Myanmar, while other use their power for personal gain by claiming to manage migrant workers from Myanmar.

Many people in Thailand see migrant workers from Myanmar as a source of problems. However, in reality, migrant workers from Myanmar are not the source of problems; they are seen as a problem only because of the view imposed by the management of the state actors. Some state actors, such as the central government, immigration officials, and police officials, know that migrant workers from Myanmar are not creating any problems; sometimes, they are even victims of problems such as human trafficking and corruption. However, these actors still treat migrant workers from Myanmar as if they are creating the problems because in doing so, they can claim their power to manage migrant workers and gain benefits from using their power. For example, when the issue of human trafficking was revealed in the international media in 2015, the central government decided to declare the issue of migration and migrant workers in

Samut Sakhon Province as a problem. Rather than attempting to stop the brokers or arresting the government officials involved in the human trafficking process, they arrested the illegal migrant workers who were victims of the problem. By doing this, the image of the state was restored. At the same time, the image of migrant workers from Myanmar as criminals was further emphasized. Another example is the stories of the migrant workers from Myanmar, police officials, and immigration officials. According to the interviews, police officers and immigration officers know that migrant workers from Myanmar are not dangerous and they are not creating any problems. However, some of them still treat migrant workers as lawbreakers because by doing that, they can receive some bribes from migrant workers.

According to the way the central government, police officers and immigration officers treat migrant workers from Myanmar, including the ways people from Myanmar are presented in the news, textbooks, and Thai public media, people from Myanmar are continuously depicted as criminals and Thailand's enemy. Many Thai people or national aristocrats, therefore, continuously view and stereotype migrant workers from Myanmar as dangerous aliens who are a source of problems in Thailand. They, thus, attempt to manage migrant workers from Myanmar through sharing their perspectives on public social media such as *Facebook*, *Pantip*, and *Youtube*. Subsequently, their perspectives that are repeatedly presented in the media strengthen the image of migrant workers from Myanmar as dangerous aliens. This discourse supports the central government, the local government, the police officials, and the immigration officials to use their power to manage and exploit migrant workers from Myanmar.

In summary, migrant workers from Myanmar are continuously discussed as Other or dangerous aliens who are a source of problems in Thailand, not because they are creating problems but because of the ways the state actors view and manage them. In the next chapter, I illustrate another way of the construction of Othering. I share migrant workers' daily life in a factory and their relationships with other groups of workers to show that migrant workers from Myanmar can be constructed as Other through the idea of identity.

## **Chapter 5. Complex relationships of workers in the factory: can we be part of them?**

As illustrated in the previous chapters, numerous Thai people view people from Myanmar as dangerous and as national enemies. At the same time, migrant workers from Myanmar are aware that a lot of Thai people hate them. For that reason, they decide to stay within their groups and create their own spaces. However, there are some spaces, such as the workplace, that Thai people and Burmese people have to confront each other. Those spaces can be called the spaces of encounter or contact zones. Studying these spaces can broaden knowledge of how Thai people and people from Myanmar interact with each other in the spaces of encounter. How do they live and work together with their inharmonious feelings? Do encounters help them reduce boundaries?

To answer these questions, I decided to study the relationships and the boundaries of workers in a furniture factory. I went to work in a furniture factory for several months in 2017 as an unskilled worker to understand the boundaries of the factory workers. I am not the first researcher who has conducted an ethnographic study in the workplace. Miriam Glucksmann (2009) conducted her research in a large motor components factory in London in 1977-1978 to explore a major issue exercising the Women's Movement in the 1970s. She explained the hierarchical occupational structure and the sexual division of labor. However, my research focuses on transnational migrants from a country in the global south to another country in the global south in 2017. Therefore, the relationship and boundaries between the workers in the furniture factory are different from Glucksmann's story. One significant difference is the division between male and female workers. In the late 1970s, the occupational inequality between male and female workers was a major issue. However, in the case of migrant workers in

Samut Sakhon Province, gender difference has less impact on job opportunities than ethnicity. The boundaries between women and men in the factory are less visible than the boundaries between workers from different ethnicities. Moreover, in the factory, there is not only the boundary between male and female workers but there exist other kinds of boundaries, such as the boundary between Thai workers and migrant workers from Myanmar, the boundaries among different migrant workers from Myanmar, the boundaries between the workers from different departments, and the boundaries between individuals. In this chapter, I will illustrate how these boundaries are constructed and deconstructed in the space of encounter, specifically in workplaces like the furniture factory.

According to my theoretical and empirical study, the boundaries are constructed through identities. Due to the in-group and out-group people having different identities, boundaries are created. Numerous researchers have demonstrated that spaces of encounter, like the workplace, can produce social cohesion and resolve the conflicts and hostility that might otherwise exist (Walters, 1999; Matejskova and Leitner, 2011; Estlund, 2003; Houston, Wright, Ellis, Holloway and Hudson, 2005; and Amin, 2006). Based on this idea, encounters in the furniture factory might be able to deconstruct the boundaries among the workers from different groups. However, in this chapter, I argue that regular encounters in the workplace cannot always reduce the boundaries between people from different groups. Sometimes workers in the factory still maintain their negative feelings and hostile practices while interacting with people from the out-groups; therefore, strategies are required to reduce these boundaries. Using “identity capital” (Côté and Levine, 2002; and Côté, 2005; 2007) or connecting one (or more) of our identities to the group’s identity is a strategy to reduce the boundaries among the workers in the factory.

The chapter begins with the demonstration of the idea of spaces of encounter. In this section, I review the idea of the space of encounter, including certain limitations. Then, in the next section, I summarize the concepts of identities and boundaries. Moreover, I theoretically illustrate how identities can shift, re-recognize, and bridge with the whole group to reduce boundaries. One of those ways is the idea of “identity capital” or bridging/adapting our identities into a new environment. Finally, the rest of the chapter will focus on the stories of the workers in the factory. I illustrate diverse relationships and various boundaries between the workers that occurred in the factory. Also, I demonstrate several situations in which the boundaries among the workers have been reduced through their use of identity capital.

### **Space of encounter**

An encounter is a meeting where conflict, unease, and favorable and unfavorable feelings (based on economic or cultural justification) towards an out-group are present (Allport, 1979). Researchers working in the area of encounter have studied spaces of encounter in order to examine how encounters construct spaces and are constructed by spaces (Anderson, 1991; Pred, 2000; Valentine and McDonald, 2004; Tropp and Petigrew, 2005; Barnett, 2005; Houston et al., 2005; Valentine, 2008; Clayton, 2009; Matejskova and Leitner, 2011; Leitner, 2012; Wilson and Darling, 2016; Schuermans, 2016; Farias, 2016; Wilson, 2016; and Mortenbock and Mooshammer, 2016). Spaces of encounter have two functions. First, spaces of contestation of different individuals or groups, in this case, the spaces of encounter, are used to examine the politics of belonging in order to define who belongs to a particular community and place and who does not. The separation of who belongs and who does not belong is defined by “cultural and racial boundaries, boundaries of place, and entitlements to economic and political resources”

(Leitner, 2012, 830). These boundaries are the boundaries dividing “us” from “them”; these boundaries create the contestation in spaces. Secondly, the spaces of encounter can also open the possibility to deconstruct boundaries and create “new spaces for negotiating across differences” (Leitner, 2012, 828) because encounters are about “the unanticipated surprise of difference” (Wilson and Darling, 2016, 11). Mónica Farias explained that encounters promoted by spaces produce “increasingly complex understandings of difference and thus shape and reshape expectations and assumptions of differently classed social groups” (2016, 169). Additionally, Leitner demonstrated that encounters and individuals’ positionalities are co-constitutive. He argued that “encounters frequently reflect and reproduce the positionalities of those involved but also hold open the possibility of positionalities being called into question through the encounter” (Leitner, 2012, 828). Therefore, spaces of encounter are not simply spaces of face-to-face contacts, but they also function as spaces of mediation that can open the possibility to reduce the boundaries. Numerous geographers, thus, have strengthened evidence to understand the processes of othering and racialization from encounters and spaces of encounter (Anderson 1991; Delaney, 1998; Jackson, 1998; Dwyer and Jones, 2000; Kobayashi and Peake, 2000; Pred, 2000; Pulido, 2000; Wilton, 2002; Hoelscher, 2003; Wright, Houston, Ellis, Holloway and Hudson, 2003; McCarthy and Hague, 2004; Mitchell, 2004; Houston et al., 2005; Wilson, 2005; and Nelson, 2008).

Recently, researchers have studied different types of spaces of encounter ranging from everyday spaces (Clayton, 2009; Philo, 2000; Amin, 2006; Thrift, 2005; and Boyd, 2006), such as residential spaces (Mouw and Entwisle, 2003), market spaces (Duruz, Luckman and Bishop, 2011; Slocum, 2008; Watson, 2006; Wood and Landry, 2008; and Wilson and Darling, 2016),

urban spaces (Amin, 2002; 2012; Massey, 2005; Valentine, 2008; Matejskova and Leitner, 2011; Leitner, 2012; Lawson and Elwood, 2014; Wilson, 2014; 2016; Schuermans, 2016; and Wilson and Darling, 2016), colleges (Qian, Blair and Ruf, 2001; Clark- Ibáñez and Felmler, 2004; and Wilson, 2014), and workplaces (Ellis, Wright and Parks, 2004; Cook, Dwyer and Waite, 2011; and Matejskova and Leitner, 2011). In addition, geographers also work on other types of spaces such as public transport (Wilson, 2011), streets and plazas (Pikner, 2016), spaces of leisure (Neal, Bennett, Cochrane and Mohan, 2015; and Parks, 2015), rural spaces (Valentine and McDonald, 2004), and cyberspaces (Kang, 2000; Luerhmann 2004; and Moss and Kwan, 2004).

The everyday space is a useful conceptual tool to examine the dynamics of identities and differences (Clayton, 2009). Individuals' acceptance and anxieties over the threat of differences are produced and reproduced through everyday spaces. Everyday space is not just a setting in which different individuals interact, but "it is actively employed through articulations and practices of belonging to mark out differences and similarities and make sense of everyday circumstance" (Clayton, 2009, 488-489). The work of everyday spaces mainly explores how identities and solidarities of people from various social, cultural, racial, and economic backgrounds are constructed and negotiated (Clayton, 2009).

Urban spaces or cities have been characterized as sites of conflict (Valentine, 1989; Davis, 1990; Smith, 1996; and Mitchell, 2003). However, in the twenty-first century, cities are reimagined as sites of connection (Valentine, 2008, 324). They are spaces where people from different backgrounds and identities are living together (Young, 1990; and Massey, 2005) or "the place of living with others" (Laurier and Philo, 2006, 193). They also are the spaces where encounters with different people are at the most intense (Clayton, 2009). Researchers who work

on urban spaces of encounter believe that cities are not just “a container in which encounters occur, but is rather made from encounters” (Amin and Thrift, 2002; Darling and Wilson, 2016; and Isin, 2002; as cited in Wilson, 2016, 453). Urban spaces are the product of “a multiplicity of encounters and thus are always under construction” (Massey, 2005; as cited in Wilson, 2016, 453). However, while numerous researchers have demonstrated that urban spaces can reduce the boundaries (Young, 1990; 2002), Ash Amin (2002) argue that encounters in urban spaces often fail to produce cultural interchange and social cohesion. He explains that, in reality, urban spaces are often territorialized by particular groups or are spaces of transit with minimal contact between strangers (Amin and Thrift, 2002; Amin, Massey and Thrift, 2000; Rosaldo, 1999; and Amin, 2002). Therefore, he suggests that cultural interchange and social cohesion are likely to occur if people step out of their routine environment into other spaces that “function as sites of unnoticeable cultural questioning or transgression” (Amin, 2002, 969), such as colleges, schools, and workplaces. These sites work as “spaces of cultural displacement” and “sites of prosaic interaction”; they are meeting places or mixed sites of everyday contact where new attitudes and identities can arise from engagement and contact with others as equals (Amin, 2002, 970). In my research, Mahachai can be seen as an urban space because it is where people from different identities and backgrounds (such as Thai people, ethnic-Chinese people, ethnic-Mon people, and people from Myanmar) are living together. Mahachai is an urban space where numerous encounters happen; however, Mahachai is also territorialized by particular groups. People from different groups have been creating their own spaces (such as the Mon temple, Burmese temple, Burmese Market, etc.). Cultural interchange and social cohesion do not frequently occur in this urban space.

Colleges are places where social network diversity correlates positively with the possibility of mixed diversity. Qian et al. (2001) stated that boundaries are weakened in the educational setting because ethnic attachments are dissolved by the rise in interactions with people from other groups. Indeed, Kara Joyner and Grace Kao (2000) and Beverly D. Tatum (1997) found that students tend to have mixed-race friendships in schools. Similar to colleges, workplaces are significant places for positive encounters among groups (Valentine and McDonald, 2004; Moskos and Butler, 1996; and Winder, 2005).

Geographers of encounter have not only focused on how encounters in spaces create a possibility for change and transformation, but some of them have also highlighted the limitations of encounter. Matejskova and Leitner, for example, argue that encounter and interactions among individual subjects “have only a limited role to play in resolving conflicts and hostility between different social groups in particular localities” (2011, 736). They draw on the research on new immigrants (Aussiedler) in Marzahn, Berlin. In response to the increased tensions between Aussiedler and local residents in Marzahn, several integration projects were launched to promote social and cultural exchange between immigrants and local people in Marzahn. One of those was providing everyday spaces of encounter where new immigrants and local residents could meet and have closer interactions. However, Matejskova and Leitner’s findings showed that attempts to create encounters did not lead to social and cultural integration and stereotype reduction. As Matejskova and Leitner stated:

The practice of exempting immigrants from their group is widespread in Marzahn.

Even local residents with more exposure to immigrants suggested that the Aussiedler

with whom they had closer relations and positive experiences were unlike the rest of the Aussiedler (2011, 734).

They also argued that positive attitude contact among different individuals might result from “a tendency of already relatively unprejudiced individuals to be in more contact with the ‘other’ rather than from an increased contact of prejudiced subjects” (Matejskova and Leitner, 2011, 720). Another example is based on Linda Tropp and Thomas Pettigrew’s study. They demonstrated that encounters can produce positive affective outcomes but cannot produce positive cognitive outcomes. Affective outcome refers to the reduction of prejudice based on one’s feelings and emotional responses to a group, while cognitive outcome refers to prejudices represented as “one’s perceptions, judgments, and beliefs about a group” (Tropp and Pettigrew, 2005, 1147). Tropp and Pettigrew stated that even though intergroup contact can lead individuals to view each other in a positive light, it cannot lead to the reduction of stereotypes of the out-group (Rothbart, 1996; Rothbart and John, 1985; and Wilder, 1984).

Additionally, Ash Amin (2002), Deborah Cameron (2000), and Timothy Phillips and Phillip Smith (2006) have observed that city spaces produce little actual interaction and exchange between strangers. Likewise, Valentine (2008) illustrated that many everyday moments of contact between different social groups do not count as encounters because they cannot produce general positive respect for others. He stated that the contacts in these shared spaces do not represent respect for others but tolerance of others. Even though tolerance can be defined as a positive attitude, it also implies a set of power relations. For example, Michael Waltzer defined tolerance as “a relationship of inequality where the tolerated groups or individuals are cast in an inferior position” (1997, 52). Therefore, many contacts in urban spaces cannot create the

reduction of boundaries; rather, they represent the reinforcement of boundaries between those who are inferior and those who are superior. Furthermore, Valentine also argued that “encounters in contemporary public space are regulated by codes of so-called ‘political correctness’” (Valentine, 2008, 329). Accordingly, positive respect, cultural exchange, and social transformation sometimes cannot occur through encounters in urban spaces.

If everyday encounters in urban spaces cannot solve conflicts, produce positive cognitive outcomes, and cannot produce respect for others, what kind of encounters can produce meaningful contact that can change a negative attitude to a positive attitude and can generalize positive attitudes to a whole group? Amin (2002) suggested that we need to create “spaces of interdependence in order to develop intercultural understanding” (as cited in Valentine, 2008, 330). These spaces refer to sites of cultural exchange, cultural destabilization, and transformation (Sandercock, 2003), which can also be called micro-public spaces of everyday social encounter (Amin, 2002). These spaces include sports clubs, drama groups, or communal gardens. Matejskova and Leitner (2011) emphasized that opportunities for engagements between different groups of people, specifically immigrants and local people, arise when they work together. Workplaces are increasingly diverse settings that lead to intergroup/inter-individual relationships. Cynthia Estlund demonstrated that “the workplace is where working adults are most likely to associate regularly with someone of another race” (2003, 3). Mary Walters (1999) seconded that workplaces are sites where interactions among different groups often take place. Additionally, Matejskova and Leitner explained that “working together facilitates repeated interactions that provide opportunities to get to know each other more intimately”; work-based relations can lead to “the establishment of acquaintances and friendships that go beyond the

workplace” (2011, 729). Amin (2006) also posited that in order to reduce prejudice and cultural racism, it is important to bring people from various backgrounds to work together. Even though segregation, inequality, and racism through innumerable avenues still shape workplaces, there are opportunities for positive meetings in the workplace for mixed ethnicities, mixed gender, and mixed classes.

Even though workplaces and micro-public spaces can lead to intergroup/inter-individual relationships, it still leaves the question of how positive feelings and respect toward others occur in the encounters and how the positive feelings can be scaled up beyond the moment of encounter. In order to answer these questions, I connect the idea of encounter with the idea of identities and boundaries and explain how boundaries between diverse groups of people can be reduced in spaces of encounter like the workplace.

### **Boundaries and identities**

Since the encounter is a meeting where conflict, unease, and positive and negative feelings toward out-group persons occur, boundaries are presented during encountering. Boundaries are contiguous zones of “contrasting density, rapid transition, or separation between internally connected clusters of population and/or activity” (Tilly, 2005, 134). They usually happen “when members of two previously separate or only indirectly linked networks enter the same social space and begin interacting” (Tilly, 2005, 138). This social space can be called space of encounter, and the interaction is a kind of encounter. According to works on encounters, researchers have attempted to study how to reduce boundaries between in-groups and out-groups through encounter and spaces of encounter. However, the reduction of boundaries in the spaces

of encounter cannot occur without a clear understanding of why the boundaries were created in the first place; why people define themselves and others as “them” and “us”.

Identity is a significant factor in making people divide themselves and others as “them” and “us”. More specifically, boundaries are created because in-group people and out-group people have different identities. According to performativity, identities are constructed through performative practices (as explained in chapter 1); therefore, boundaries are also constructed through performative practices. They are reiteratively produced and reproduced. To understand how boundaries are constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed through the idea of identity, in the following sections, I talk about my stories and the workers’ stories in the space of encounter, specifically a furniture factory in Samut Sakhon Province. I explain how workers in the factory perform their performative bordering practices (Kaiser, 2012; 2014) and share ways to reduce boundaries among different groups of workers.

### **My first encounter**

August 1st, 2017 was my first day going to work in the furniture factory. I got this job because the owner of the factory is my distant relative. In other words, I used my social network to get the job. From my apartment, it took around 10-15 minutes to drive to the factory as there was no bus to the factory. However, for the migrant workers who lived in other apartments, they would come to the factory by motorcycle. Most of them ride motorcycles without a driving license; however, some of them have a fake driving license which they got from their brokers. Some Thai workers drive a car to the factory but most of them would ride their motorcycle to the factory. I could not ride a motorcycle since I had a motorcycle accident many years ago.

Therefore, I had only two options: drive to the factory or come to the factory with my relative (the manager of the factory). I thought it would be strange if I came to the factory with the factory manager since the workers in the factory would know that I am the manager's cousin. I did not want them to know since it would impede on the purpose of my research. In the factory, only the factory owner, factory manager, and some office workers who are my cousins knew that I was the owner's relative. As requested, the owner and the manager did not tell the others (however, my Mon friend later found out that I was the owner's relative when we became close friends because I disclosed this information to her). Therefore, to keep the secret, I decided to drive to the factory by myself with my mom's 18-year-old car.



*Figure 8: A furniture factory in Samut Sakhon Province*

In the morning, I woke up early and prepared to go to work. Previously, I had received the uniforms, blue T-shirts, from the employer. I wore the uniform with long pants. I was very nervous and I did not want to look different from the workers there. While I was dressing, I was so worried about whether I could work in the factory, whether I would have friends in the factory, and whether I would receive any information from the factory workers. Because of my anxiety, I arrived at the factory early, around 7:15 a.m. The work would start at 8 a.m. I came inside the factory and saw many people wearing blue T-shirts. Some of them were lining up to do something. I did not know what they were doing at that time, but later I learned that they were

punching in. They had to punch in before 8 in the morning and punch out after 5 in the afternoon. After my introduction at the factory, some of the workers glanced at me, some stared, while others ignored me. I felt that the place and the people were so strange.

I came to the factory with the identity as a new Chinese-Thai worker. This identity was constructed because of the discourse of nationality, physical appearances, and performative practices. As a Chinese-Thai, my skin color was more white than local Thai people, people from northeastern Thailand, and people from Myanmar. Although there might be some Chinese-Thai workers in the factory, most of the factory workers were migrant workers from Myanmar and Thai workers from Samut Sakhon and northeastern Thailand. Also, I speak the central Thai language. I had little in common with the workers in this factory except that I was studying their lifestyles. I was highly concerned about the boundary between them and me because the boundaries are fundamentally constructed through my nationality, physical appearances, and performative identity. Concerned, I thought a lot about how to reduce the boundary between the workers and me in the factory. According to Robert Kaiser (2012; 2014), borders or boundaries are created by identities or categories constructed from performative practices. People are usually repeatedly practicing without questioning their practices, and these practices become natural for them; they become their identity. Therefore, I had to reduce my “performative bordering practices” (Kaiser, 2012; 2014).

Before the work started, I went to say “hi” to the manager, who is my aunt, and then went to the restroom to hide and wait until 8 o’clock. At the restroom, I tried to calm myself down. I was so nervous, excited, and worried at the same time. I did not like the way the workers looked at me. I felt I would never be friends with them because of how they stared at me, looking at me

ambiguously and unfriendly. I thought it would take a long time for me to receive any information from them.



*Figure 9: Work in the warehouse in the furniture factory*

The factory alarm beeped at 8 o'clock. I came out of the restroom and went to meet the manager. The manager took me to the warehouse, where I was to work for several months. The warehouse was big and noisy, with lots of equipment and furniture. It was also very hot and dusty. There were no fans or air-conditioners because the wind would blow the dust around. I had only been there for five minutes and already I began to sweat profusely. The warehouse was

divided into different departments, such as the Packing Department, Painting Department, Sanding-I Department, Sanding-II Department, Cutting Department, Composition Department, etc.

I walked past various departments and almost everybody in the warehouse looked at me. I recognized that there were two groups of people in the warehouse. The first group comprised of people who wore grey Polo shirts and the second group wore blue T-shirts like me. The manager told me that people wearing grey Polo shirts were the heads and the deputies of each department. The manager took me to the Composition Department and introduced me to a man, the head of the department. The department head then took me to a table where there were two women. The head told me to work there and told the women to teach me how to work. The two women taught me how to put four square wooden boards together to be a square block and then use glue to stick those boards together. The work was not difficult, but the glue would stick to your hands all the time. It was irritating and itchy. Sometimes, slivers stung my hands. While working at this department, I could not sit because it was not comfortable to sit and work. Moreover, I could not use my phone or have any food while working. I could only drink water or go to the restroom. I went to the restroom several times in the morning to clean my hand from the itchy glue. As a worker, I had to work from 8 o'clock to noon continuously.

I attempted to speak with the women I worked with several times but they did not want to speak with me. One of them did not talk to me at all. I tried to speak to them in the Thai language. I knew that they understood the language because when I asked them about the work, they could respond to me and give me what I wanted. However, they did not answer my non-work related questions. I believe speaking the Thai language constructed me as a Thai worker.

Therefore, the boundary was created because of my performance. Contrary to Miriam's experience in the motor components factory, Miriam never felt that she did not belong since other women tried to talk to her or at least said "hello" to her (Glucksmann, 2009). I felt that I could not belong to the workers' group because no one wanted to talk to me. Therefore, I decided to keep working and thinking about a way to break down the boundary between them and me. Finally, one of them started to talk to me because she saw glue stuck on my T-shirt. She asked me in the Thai language whether I had an apron. I told her that I did not have one. She then asked her friends to see if anybody had an extra apron. One of her friends gave her an apron and then she gave that apron to me. I thought it was a good opportunity to open the conversation with her again. I, thus, asked her about her name and her personal information. She answered, but the boundary between her and me was still apparent. Even though there was no physical boundary, I felt that I would never be friends with them. I felt that there was a barrier between them and me which pushed me back when I tried to befriend them. This boundary was not physically visible but emotionally and psychologically. I gained no information from working for a half day. I still had no friends. Even though she gave me an apron and talked to me a little bit, the barrier between them and me was not broken. In the first half day, my identity in this factory was a new Chinese-Thai worker who was absolutely an outsider. This shows that mutual presence in the space of encounter, like the workplace, cannot reduce the boundaries between different groups of people. Regardless of strategy, sometimes like in my case, normal conversation in everyday contact cannot make an out-group person become a part of the group.

In the afternoon, I was moved to work in another department, the Sanding-II Department. The manager told me that I would receive more information if I worked in this department

because the workers in this department were more talkative than in the Composition Department. The manager sent me to a group of female workers and asked them to teach me the work. The work in this department included puttying the cracked wood and sanding the wood. The workers taught me how to fix the cracked wood with putty. They did not talk to me a lot in the first hour. Also, I was scared to talk to them because I had tried in the morning and there was a minimal response. However, working and facing each other for hours without talking became very tedious. Therefore, I decided to start talking to them. I started to talk to them in the Thai language. They answered me, but like the morning attempt, I could feel the boundary between them and me. I thought that my identity was the problem. To deconstruct boundaries, an individual's identities need to be shifted, re-recognized, or bridged to the whole group's identity. However, the workers in the factory still saw me as a new Chinese-Thai worker who had nothing connected to them at all.

Ethnic identity and national identity are very difficult to change because time and legalization are required to change them. However, based on the idea of performativity, identity is performative. Therefore, it does not mean that the boundaries created from my identity as a Sino-Thai cannot be deconstructed. The deconstruction of the boundaries can occur when the continuity of identity is interrupted through changes of performative practice. As Butler explained (2010), performativity can sometimes fail to produce what it anticipates and open up the possibility. I might possibly become a part of the workers' group, but in order for it to happen, I had to find a strategy to help me to become accepted by the migrant workers. According to James Côté, the strategy I was going to use is called "identity capital".

Identity capital, guided by Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical approach to capital and coined and developed by James Côté (1996; 2002; 2005}, is a concept "to explain the varied resources individuals have available to negotiate changing...environments" (Ho and Bauder, 2012, 281). Bourdieu (1986) categorized capital into four forms: economic capital, social capital, cultural capital, and symbolic capital. Economic capital refers to financial wealth and economic assets. Social capital refers to social connection and networking. Cultural capital means "embodied attributes, material objects, and institutional recognition, which can signify cultural competence," including cultural knowledge and interpretation (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; as cited in Ho and Bauder, 2012, 282). Symbolic capital refers to prestige and honor (Bourdieu, 1977; 1998; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). These four forms of capital are closely interrelated and can be exchanged with one another (Bourdieu, 1986). For example, people can use their social networks (social capital) to get a job and then generate financial wealth (economic capital) (Thompson, 1991). These four forms of capital define the person's position and are used as strategies to navigate in the changing environment (Ho and Bauder, 2012). In other words, a person uses the capital they possess to reproduce their social structures and their positions; they use their capital to either be a part or not be a part of a new environment. Identity capital is another form of capital that includes "a set of psychosocial skills or a set of strengths" to adapt, strategize, and present one's identity into a new environment (Côté and Levine, 2002; as cited in Ho and Bauder, 2012, 284). It refers to "the varied resources deployable on an individual basis that represents how people most effectively define themselves and have others define them, in various contexts" (Côté and Levine, 2002, 142). Identity capital includes both tangible resources (social, economic, and cultural capital) and intangible resources (psychosocial vitalities and

capacities) (Côté, 2005). A person can use identity capital strategically to adjust and navigate himself/herself in different social environments (Ludvig, 2006; and Côté, 2007). Moreover, the idea of identity capital is creating social cohesion in the different social contexts by bridging their identity and practices to the environment, rather than by bonding (Côté, 2005). Therefore, using identity capital is not a process of assimilation; instead, it is a process of linking and connecting two similar capital. However, to use identity capital and to reconstitute performative identity, changing performances are required.

Based on performance theory, our performances are designed as “a signal-system” to ourselves within social groups (Goffman, 1959, 28); they become performative and reinforce our identity (Butler 1993). However, performance is not only self-constituted but it is an action that involves a set of social relationships and a number of people, objects, and institutions (Butler, 1993). Therefore, identity, which is reinforced by performances, is not only constructed by self. For example, in the furniture factory, the migrant workers in the warehouse are expected to comport themselves in particular ways, such as the ways they talk, dress, or eat. According to these performances, a person can be identified as a part of the migrant workers in the factory while those who behave differently will be seen as Other. Their performances reinforce their performative identity as migrant workers. However, since performance is not a lone self-constituting act and identity does not pre-exist the performance (Butler, 1990), the performance can be changed through social relations and it can support a new identity. Nicky Gregson and Gillian Rose (2000) gave the case of community arts workers in the late 1960s in Edinburgh as an example. Due to the performativity of community arts projects that were used to develop new performances of the participants and create a group identity, the participants saw themselves as

community arts workers rather than social workers or artists. The repetition of new performances created by the projects changed the participants' pre-existing identity and performatively reconstituted a new discourse as community arts workers (Gregson and Rose, 2000). Therefore, performance is always connected to performativity, and it can help to reconstitute a new identity.

Accordingly, to become friends with migrant workers from Myanmar, I had to find my new identity utilizing the capital I had and change my performances. One capital I had my knowledge of the Burmese language. I changed my performance by speaking in Burmese and, unbelievably, this capital and my new performance worked effectively. They were surprised when I spoke in Burmese to them. They started to talk to me more, and they asked me many questions. For example, who am I? Why did I come to work here? How can you speak Burmese? I told them that I was a student studying workers in the factory and the Burmese language, and I also asked them to teach me some Burmese and to tell me about life in the factory because I had to go back to do the homework assigned by the university. Consequently, they talked to me and began to accept me. They taught me how to improve my Burmese. They made fun of their friend and allowed me to make fun of their friend by using the Burmese language. Sometimes, I did not understand what they said in Burmese so they translated to Thai for me. Afterward, we spoke Thai more than Burmese because their Thai language skill was much better than my Burmese language skill. I thought it was a good first step of getting close to them. My new identity and new performances, partially, could link to them. That afternoon, the boundary between them and me cracked and I felt that I could be a part of their group in the future.

While the boundary between me and the migrant workers from Myanmar started to become deconstructed, the boundary between Thai workers (including workers from Samut

Sakhon Province and workers from northeastern Thailand) and me was reconstructed. Since I became close to the migrant workers from Myanmar in the Sanding-II Department, no Thai workers came to talk to me. I had to use my identity capital again to familiarize myself with the Thai workers. This time I used my badminton skills to make myself known to them. Every evening, after work, Thai workers usually grouped together and played badminton at the badminton court in the factory. Therefore, after work, I decided to go to the badminton court to make friends with them by playing badminton. This helped me to become friends with some Thai workers. As Hjørleifur Jonsson (2001; 2003) explained, sports and games are social and cultural dynamics that lead to the national integration of ethnic minorities. Even though I am not an ethnic minority, I used sports to nationally engage and integrate with other Thai workers. However, most Thai workers in the factory thought that I was a part of the migrant workers' group. The boundary between Thai workers and me was reconstructed due to the deconstruction of the boundary between the migrant workers and me.

### **Their everyday encounters**

Working in the factory in the different departments for several months allowed me to see various relationships and different boundaries among the workers. According to the workers' social network, workers in the factories include Mon workers (a majority population in the factory,) Burmese-ethnic workers, Dawei workers, local Thai workers, Mon-Thai workers, Chinese-Thai workers and workers from northeastern Thailand. Additionally, there were both male and female workers in the factory in every department. The ratio of male and female workers in the factory was about equal. However, some departments had more male workers than female workers and other departments had more female workers than male workers.

Therefore, some departments were male-dominant departments while some were female-dominant departments. The vast majority of the workers in the factory were Buddhists. Even though social networks would make this factory become a Buddhist-Mon-dominant factory, diverse identities still created boundaries among the workers in the factory.

The first type of boundaries that was readily apparent was the boundary between the migrant workers from Myanmar and the Thai workers. The Thai workers are nationally born as Thai (and this governs their performances); those who are not nationally born as Thai are seen as Burmese or Others. Their birthplace constructs this boundary. In the factory, usually native-born workers and migrant workers from Myanmar did not talk to each other even though they worked together and sometimes sat next to each other. This kind of situation continuously happened in the factory. Their discourse about nationality governed their performative practices and constructed their identity, which divided them into Thai vs. non-Thai. I had worked with a migrant workers' group in the Sanding-II Department for two weeks. I knew many migrant workers because they came to talk to the migrant workers in the group. Several members in the group were very talkative, therefore, numerous migrant workers from the Sanding-II Department and other departments usually came to talk to them. I knew many migrant workers because my migrant worker friend introduced them to me when they came to my table. However, the native-born workers never came to talk to the migrant workers in the group. I worked in the Sanding-II Department for two weeks without ever learning who the Thai workers in the department were. Therefore, I thought that there were no native-born workers in the Sanding-II Department but Wah Khaing, a migrant worker from Myanmar, told me that there were several Thai workers in the department. I asked her who they were, but Wah Khaing did not reply. Later, around week

four, I realized that Thai workers worked at a table located just two tables away from my table since they never conversed with any migrant workers in the department. This might also reflect the power relations in the department. Since the migrant workers from Myanmar dominated the department, the Thai workers may have felt insecure when they had to talk to the migrant workers. The Thai workers, therefore, preferred to work quietly in the department. However, the migrant workers thought that the Thai workers did not like them and did not want to talk to them. The boundary between migrant workers from Myanmar and Thai workers was reinforced through their preconceived notions and their performative practices.

Another example of this boundary was presented in the Packing Department. I went to work in the Packing Department in the third week. In the Packing Department, most of the workers were male migrant workers. There were only five female workers in the department, and four of them were Thai workers out of around 30 workers in the department. When I first arrived, the first person to talk to me was Soe Soe, the only female migrant worker in the department. Later, I got to know four Thai workers. I soon realized three of them usually grouped and gossiped about everything while working. Soe Soe was usually ignored by the Thai workers. When Soe Soe started to talk to them, they always expressed unfriendliness. For example, they did not answer Soe Soe's questions and often moved to another table. Sometimes, they answered Soe Soe's question aggressively by using slang words and showing hateful facial expressions. The boundary between Thai female workers and the migrant female worker in the Packing Department was distinct when they shouted at each other. I witnessed that situation because all-female workers worked together at the same table. Soe Soe asked a Thai worker a question about work. She asked, "Should we do this?" For me, it was a reasonable question, but

the Thai worker replied with a loud voice, “Don’t you already know? Why do you have to ask? Of course, we need to do it!” Soe Soe then responded with a louder voice, “But the head said we don’t need to finish this! If we have enough, we should move to do other work.” By now, the Thai workers started shouting, “Why don’t we need to finish it? We need to finish it! If you don’t want to work, don’t work! If you want to go, just go!” The migrant worker shouted back to the Thai workers, “Why don’t you listen to the department head? The head said that! You are not the head! We are all employees!” After the altercation, Soe Soe moved to work at another table. Five minutes afterward, the head of the department came and asked us to stop working on our current task and move to do other work. In that situation, it was obvious that they disrespected each other. They were ready to fight each other, even in a normal conversation. They had been working together for a long time yet they could not get along with each other. Their antagonistic practices kept emerging in the factory.

The boundary between the migrant workers and the native-born workers in the Packing Department was not only shown in the female group, but also the entire group. The native-born workers did not typically respect the migrant workers from Myanmar. They often acted as if they were superior and knew better than migrant workers from Myanmar. They acted as if they were the boss of the migrant workers from Myanmar or acted like national aristocrats (as mentioned in chapter 4). For example, Rai, a Thai woman in the Packing Department, always called migrant workers by their physical appearances such as black or fat. She never called the migrant workers by their names. Moreover, she always ordered the migrant workers to work. If they were not under orders, Rai would complain and blame them.

The performative bordering practices in the Packing Department are reiteratively performed. I had to endure this apparent boundary every day for a week while working in the Packing Department. In week four, I had a chance to move to another department so I decided to move to the Cover Department. In the Cover Department, most of the workers were migrant workers from Myanmar; there was a Thai woman named Pen, working in this department, and me. The boundary between the Thai workers and the migrant worker in Myanmar in this department was vague. Pen seemed to be close to the other workers in the department. Pen adapted herself to the department and changed her performances. They talked to each other and played with each other. Therefore, practically, the barrier between Pen and the other workers in the department was less evident than in the Packing Department. Pen told me that she thought migrant workers from Myanmar are similar to Thai because their culture and behavior are not different from what the Thai people do, but she also told me that migrant workers are dirty and their food is inedible (as illustrated in section 4). However, these do not seem to be a significant problem in her relationship with migrant workers from Myanmar.

Even though numerous scholars might say that the workplace is an effective space of encounter for creating intergroup relationships, based on my empirical study, I found that without an attempt to bridge the identity and practices of the group, the boundaries between different groups in the workplace could not be easily deconstructed. Intergroup connections and relationships are difficult to create. The stories show that in the workplace, migrant workers from Myanmar and native-born workers can avoid talking to each other or even produce negative encounters with each other. The boundary between the two groups was continuously created and recreated. Only Pen and the migrant workers from Myanmar in the Cover Department, who saw

that they have similar identity and practices that can link to each other, could reduce their boundary.

However, the deconstruction of boundaries mostly can happen if similar identity and practices are accepted by both sides, like in my case or in the case of Pen and the migrant workers from Myanmar in the Cover Department. Sometimes, the identity that one performs is not accepted and he/she cannot be a part of the group. Soe Soe, for example, had been living in Thailand for many years and her performances became Thai. Her practices could link to the idea of performativity (Butler, 1993) and performative bordering practice (Kaiser, 2012; 2014). Soe Soe realized her repeated performative practices and started performing in different ways because she wanted other people to recognize her as a Thai. She dressed and applied makeup like a Thai and always spoke in Thai. Even when she spoke with other migrant workers from Myanmar, she often spoke in the Thai language. Her performative identity as Thai had been recognized by the migrant workers from Myanmar. The migrant workers from Myanmar in the Sanding-II Department always told me that Soe Soe was not Burmese, she was Thai. Before moving to work in the Packing Department, Wah Khaing, a migrant worker in Sanding-II Department, told me that “There is no Burmese female worker in the Packing Department. There are only Thai female workers there. When you go there, you will meet them.” Wah Khaing said this because she did not view Soe Soe as Burmese anymore. Wah Khaing revealed to me, “Actually, there is one Burmese worker there, but she is not Burmese. She is Thai now. You must go and see her. She dresses like Thai, does makeup like a Thai woman, and is so close to Thai workers. She has never talked to us.” Soe Soe’s performances as a Thai made Soe Soe an out-group person to the migrant workers from Myanmar.

However, her performative identity was not accepted by the Thai workers. As illustrated earlier, Soe Soe and the native-born workers did not get along with each other. They never thought that Soe Soe was Thai or could be a part of their group. It can be seen that boundaries are sometimes designated by other people. Regardless of one's different inherited, legitimated, social, ego, or performative identity, an individual cannot get into a group if members in the group do not accept him/her. Evidently, Soe Soe was neither part of the migrant workers' group nor the Thai workers' group. She was always alone, and finally, she decided to change her work when the housekeeper in the office resigned. She asked the manager if she could take that position. The manager allowed her to work as the housekeeper since she could speak Thai very well. She told me that she was so happy working as a housekeeper in the office because she could not get along with either the migrant workers or the Thai workers in the warehouse. The boundary between Soe Soe and the migrant workers from Myanmar was reconstructed due to her performative practices, while the boundary between Soe Soe and the Thai workers had never been deconstructed because the Thai workers never accepted her performative identity.

The second kind of boundaries was the boundary among migrant workers from different ethnicities. In the factory, as mentioned, the workers had different ethnicities. The discourse of ethnicity creates different stereotypes for different ethnicities and then leads to performative bordering practices. In the Sanding-II Department, the workers included Mon workers, Burmese workers, Thai workers, and a Mon-Thai worker. The workers that I usually worked with were Mon and Burmese. In the factory, Mon and Burmese workers did not talk to each other a lot. Wah Khaing, a Mon worker, told me that they did not like Burmese workers because the Burmese workers diverged from them. She further said that "Burmese workers don't work hard;

they don't want to work. If they have a kid, they will send the kid to school, but Mon people want the kid to work." Wah Khaing stereotyped Burmese people as lazy workers because they did not want their kids to work. There were two Burmese workers in the group and they were sometimes excluded from the group. Some of the Mon workers in the group believed that Cho, one of the two Burmese workers, was a prostitute. The Mon workers hated the way Cho behaved in the factory. They said that she always talked to men, which Mon people would not do. Hence, the two Burmese workers in the group were sometimes neglected by other Mon workers. The Mon workers did not talk to the Burmese workers and occasionally gossiped about the Burmese workers in the Mon language even though the two Burmese workers would be working at the same table with them. However, it was not just the Mon workers that disliked the Burmese workers.

Similarly, Burmese workers disliked Mon workers as well. Zhu Zhu, a Burmese worker in the Cover Department, had divorced several months prior, and she was looking for a new man to marry. She told me that she would only marry a Burmese. She would not marry Mon people. Her family would not accept Mon people to be a part of her family. Several Burmese people told me that Mon people were uneducated and boorish; thus, they did not like Mon people.

The last kind of boundaries I saw was the boundary between male and female workers. Although, according to Butler, sex is a performative practice, gender segregation in the furniture factory seemed to be fixed and natural rather than performative. In the factory, female workers rarely talked to male workers. Even though they were wife and husband, brother and sister, or mother and son, they infrequently talked to each other. For example, a Mon female worker in our group who worked at the table next to my table never talked to her husband, who worked at the

table next to her. I had not known that they were wife and husband until the last month I worked there. I was surprised when I learned that my friend's husband worked at the same or the next department because I had never seen them talking to each other. Normally, female and male workers in the factory did not talk to each other; hence, it was unusual if a woman went to talk to a man. Cho, thus, became Other (from the perspective of the female migrant workers) when she talked to men.

These performative bordering practices were performed in everyday encounters and they repeatedly constructed the boundaries among the workers in the factory. However, this does not mean that boundaries cannot be reduced. Sometimes, these boundaries were deconstructed through the changes in performance, such as the use of political and cultural capital.

### **Mom/dad is coming!**

“Mom is coming!” “Dad is coming!” These are sentences I heard everyday while working in the factory. Mom and Dad, in this case, referred to the chiefs of the department. The workers called the chief of the department “mom/dad”. By calling this, the workers became the chief's daughters/sons. The department became their family, and it did not matter what their other identities were. Their identity had shifted to be a member of the family (department). I call this political capital. Politically, the workers knew how to behave in the factory. They knew whom they should support in order to work in the factory peacefully. Therefore, they bridged their identities and practices to become sons or daughters of the department heads. With this political identity, the workers became a part of the group, and their mom/dad would protect them. When they saw themselves as a part of the department, or as a son or daughter of the head

of the department, the previous boundaries among the workers in the department could be reduced.

Workers in the Sanding-II Department, for example, usually talked to each other about how good their mom, Varin, was, how generous their mom was compared to other chiefs, and how lucky they were to be working with their mom. Sometimes, they went to have lunch or dinner together at their mom's place. Additionally, when they felt that their mom's situation was inferior to other chiefs' situations, they would group together to help their mom. On New Year's Eve, for instance, the Sanding-II Department workers found out that the chiefs of the Cover Department and the Sanding-I Department received New Year's gifts from their workers while the workers received T-shirts from their chiefs and wore them in the workplace. The workers in the Sanding-II Department felt bad that their mom did not receive a gift from them. Therefore, they gathered together and discussed what they should buy and give to their mom. At that time, they temporarily forgot about the boundaries they had. Finally, to make their mom proud of them, they bought a golden ring for her and spread the news to the whole factory that their mom got a golden ring as a gift. For me, this seemed to be exploitative. However, for the workers, this was an investment to make their dad/mom love them. Also, it was an opportunity to show other groups (or people from other departments) that their department was better than other departments.



*Figure 10: Lunch meeting in Sanding II Department*

As shown through these situations, by using political capital, the identity can be shifted differently; they viewed themselves as the sons/daughters of the chief of the department rather

than mere subordinates. However, as a new identity was forged through new practices, the boundaries between workers from different departments were reconstructed. For instance, the workers from different departments competed with each other about how nice their mom/dad was and also spread bad news about other departments. Sanding-II Department's workers always said that the Sanding-I Department's chief was cruel and that she always yelled at the workers. Moreover, they always said that "the Sanding-I Department has less work than the Sanding-II Department; we work harder than them." The workers liked having a lot of work because they could get more money if they could work overtime. In addition, the boundaries among workers from different departments were always visible when workers from diverse departments had to come and work together. For instance, there were several times while I was working at the Cover Department, that some of the workers from the Packing Department had to come to work at the Cover Department. While working, the workers from the two departments did not talk to each other at all. They only talked to the workers from the same department, regardless of their ethnicities and gender.

For example, Kook, a female Thai worker from the Packing Department, attempted to talk to several male Burmese workers from the same department. I was so surprised because, previously, when I had been working at the Packing Department, Kook had never talked to those male Burmese workers. However, when she had to come and work with workers from the Cover Department, she decided to start a conversation with male Burmese workers from her department, rather than talking to the Thai worker or female migrant workers from the Cover Department. This encounter demonstrated that while identity as a part of the department could

reduce barriers among the same department's workers, it also reconstructed boundaries between workers from different departments.

However, using political capital reinforces power relations and hierarchical performance. To regard oneself as a son/daughter of the department heads in order to be a part of the department, the workers unconsciously grant a special respect and obedience to the department heads. Sometimes, they are exploited by the heads of the department. For example, when the workers have to buy a gift for their mom/dad as a New Year's present or when they have to defend their mom/dad when workers from other departments criticize him/her. However, the workers do not realize that they are exploited. They thought that these were things they should do as a son/daughter. Therefore, using political capital constitutes an exploitative routine in the workplace, and it has become performative practices that construct and strengthen a hierarchy in the workplace.

### **What numbers this time?**

I started working on August 1st, 2017. It was a hot and humid afternoon, and I spent the day getting accustomed to the factory temperature and unfamiliar environment. I joked and talked a lot with the workers in the Sanding-II Department and some workers outside the department. They looked happy and energetic. However, it was not just the Sanding-II Department workers that looked enthusiastic and excited; lots of workers around me seemed to be very active compared to in the morning. They walked around and talked to each other, but I did not pay much attention to who talked to whom and what they talked about. I thought it might be because it was the afternoon and they were waiting to clock out. Around 4 p.m., I suddenly

heard some people shout, “Hey!” followed by the phrase, “I was eaten by lotteries!” “What happened?” I asked my Mon Friend. She explained to me that today is a lottery day and someone just won the lottery while most of us, like her, lost money in the lottery. She said that the workers, including her, were waiting for the results enthusiastically and hopefully, but most workers lost money. “I am poor now, and I don’t feel like working anymore,” she said. However, Kin, another Mon worker in the group, won the lottery. She looked so happy and told me that she would buy me ice cream the next day because she won the lottery. As promised, the next morning, she gave me ice cream. After the lottery result had been announced, the factory workers did not focus on their work anymore. Afterward, I realized that playing the lottery was a significant social and cultural practice for the workers in this furniture factory, and this practice could make people in the factory enthusiastically talk to each other. This practice could reduce all boundaries happening in the factory. The word “they” became “us” twice a month, on the 1st and the 16th of each month.

Three or four days before the lottery day, the workers were seriously looking for the numbers. Every day, numerous people would come to my table and ask, “What numbers this time?” Some people came but did not say anything. They wrote some numbers down on my table in order to share the numbers with my friends. Interestingly, the people who came to my table included Burmese, Mon, Mon-Thai, and Thai workers. They also included both male and female workers, warehouse workers, office workers, and department chiefs. They wanted to know the numbers my friends had. Similarly, my friends wanted to know the number they had. Therefore,

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<sup>9</sup> I was eaten by lotteries, lottery is eaten or lottery eats my money is a Thai slang, referring to losing money in the lottery.

during break times, my friends would go around and talk to other workers about the numbers they had gotten. When they came back to the table, they would write the numbers down on their paper. Thus, there were several sets of numbers on the paper. I asked my friend, “How did they get those numbers?” My friend told me that they (the workers) got the numbers from other workers. Some of them received them from the office workers. Some of them received the numbers from their “mom” or “dad” and even from the manager of the factory. The numbers had been transferred from one person to another person. Therefore, most of the workers in the factory might have the same numbers.

I was so curious about where the numbers were originally from and how the numbers came out. I then attempted to do further investigation to see where the numbers came from. I asked many workers about their numbers and who had given the numbers to them. I found out that several sets of numbers came from workers who usually won the lottery. The first person was Khao, the chief of the Cover Department. The second person was Muay, the factory manager, and the third person was Kloy, a Thai worker in the Storing Department. Khao told me that she had a sense of numbers that would be correct, so she always trusted her senses. On this occasion, she felt that the correct numbers should be something related to me. Therefore, she went to look at my car and remembered my license plate number. She asked me, “Is 3045 your car license number?” I told her, “I really cannot remember; it is my mom’s car.” Then she said, “Yes, 3045 is your number. I remember.” I laughed and asked her, “How could you remember my license plate number? I even cannot remember it.” She said, “Because I felt that the lottery would go with these numbers, and I will play with these numbers.” However, this set of numbers was not the only set of numbers she would play. She also had several sets of other numbers. She

said she shared some numbers with other workers, but not all. She did not tell anybody about my license plate number. Moreover, surprisingly, she won the lottery because of my car license number. The lottery numbers at that time were 54, and she won 2,000 baht (around 65 dollars). However, she did not share these numbers with anybody; therefore, she was the only one who won the lottery at that time. Her reputation as a lottery winner had spread again.

On the other hand, Muay did not say where she got the numbers. Similar to Khao, she shared some numbers with other workers, but not all of them. She said, “Who is going to share good numbers with others? It should be a secret!” and laughed. Therefore, the numbers that had been spread throughout the factory were numbers that she thought would not be correct. She also asked me whether I played the lottery. I said, “No, I have never played the lottery. I never have luck, and I would never win.” Muay told me, “You are a good one. Never gamble. In the past, I did not know how to play the lottery either. I started playing it since I came to work here. How could I not? Everybody here played the lottery, so I had to play it too.” She also said a Thai proverb “เข้าเมืองตาหลิ่ว ต้องหลิ่วตาตาม”, which is similar to the saying “When in Rome, do as the Romans do”, which means adjusting oneself to the surrounding environment. For her, the first time playing the lottery was a form of socialization. It was a practice that she used to interact with other workers in the factory or a practice to be accepted by other workers as a part of the factory. However, she won the lottery many times and became a big fan of playing the lottery. At present, she is the one who collects the lottery numbers from the workers and she might get a cut from the lottery winnings. Therefore, for Muay, playing the lottery was not so much a strategy to become a part of the workers’ group as a way to gain money from the workers.

Finally, Kloy explained that she received the numbers from social media and several Thai TV programs. Those media would always reveal different sets of lucky numbers. She would then compare those numbers and see if the same numbers emerged. If the numbers were said to be lucky numbers from several channels, that meant the numbers were trustworthy. She would thus play with those numbers. Kloy was the only one that always shared all the lucky numbers she had with other people. Her numbers were usually spread to the whole factory. However, even though the workers would share the numbers, they did not believe in those numbers every time. They were confident in themselves and their own numbers as they had played the lottery for many years.

Playing the lottery could reduce the boundaries among the workers in the factory. The workers talked to each other about lucky numbers without concern about their different identities. Some of them, such as Muay, used this practice as a way to become accepted by the whole group. After becoming friends with the workers, however, she exploited the workers by using the lottery. Playing the lottery is a cultural capital that bridges people from different identities into a group. It made diverse workers in the furniture factory unite in attempting to search for the lucky numbers to win the lottery. However, unfortunately, their becoming one only lasted for several days; the boundaries between them were reconstructed again after the lottery day.

There might be instances where the boundaries between the workers during these encounters have not been conceivably deconstructed. The workers might only act like there are no boundaries between them, but the boundaries are still continuously and reiteratively created. In these particular cases, there is no deconstruction and reconstruction of the boundaries. There is

only a constant construction of the boundaries and using identity capital is a technique to communicate with others, not a strategy to be a part of the group. However, many cases connecting one's identity to the group's identity literally help reduce the boundaries in the factory, such as my case and the manager of the factory. Also, sharing cultures and practices with other workers, while unable to completely deplete the boundaries between workers, could reduce some negative prejudice and increase positive prejudice toward the Other. Connecting one's identity to the group's identity is still a promising way to reduce the boundaries in this furniture factory; it has a more positive effect than negative.

### **Us or them: the complex relationships in the factory**

Workplaces can produce opportunities for engagements between different groups of people, leading to intergroup/inter-individual relationships (Walters, 1999; Matejskova and Leitner, 2001; and Estlund, 2003). It can also reduce prejudice and provide positive connections across different groups (Houston et al., 2005). This chapter has shown the stories of relationships between the workers from different groups in the furniture factory and has provided evidence that regular encounters in the workplace could not reduce the boundaries between different groups. Workers in the factory often maintained their negative feelings and practices while interacting with people from out-groups. They had connections and relationships, but their relationships were negative rather than positive relationships. However, the deconstruction of the boundaries between workers in the factory could occur when the workers changed their performative practices and used their various identity capital, such as social capital, cultural capital, and political capital, to connect with the whole group. By doing this, the workers could become a part of the group; they could become Us.

To explain how to deconstruct the boundaries more practically, I have illustrated the stories I experienced and received while working in the furniture factory. In these stories, I have proved that identities and boundaries are not fixed. They can be deconstructed and reconstructed through the changes in performance and performative practices and the use of identity capital.

First of all, I explained how as a new worker in the factory, I used social capital, my Burmese language skills, to adapt to a new environment and be accepted by the migrant workers' group. In my case, the social capital that I strategically used helped me to be part of the migrant workers' group.

Second, I demonstrated how Soe Soe, a migrant worker from Myanmar, changed her performative practices to change her identity. In this case, her new identity was acknowledged by the migrant workers from Myanmar's group but it was not accepted by the Thai workers' group. The boundary between her and the Thai workers was not reduced while the boundary between her and the migrant workers from Myanmar was constructed, distancing her from both groups. Her performative practices partially changed her identity; her identity changed from Burmese to Thai through the view of migrant workers from Myanmar but not through the Thai workers. The Thai workers still viewed her as a Burmese, an outsider. Changing our performance does not always help us change our identity because how other people view us is also a crucial component. As I mentioned in the first chapter, identity requires acceptance and recognition by both sides of the interaction. Therefore, without other people's acceptance, one's identity will be confined and unable to shift to the identity he/she wants to be.

I also illustrated how the factory workers used political capital to reduce the boundaries and become a part of the group. In my case study, political capital refers to the workers' skill to choose what side to support or skill of the workers to adjust themselves to converge on powerful persons. With this political identity, the workers became a part of the group; they saw themselves as a part of the department, or as a son or daughter of the head of the department. Consequently, the previous boundaries (such as ethnic boundary, gender boundary, or national boundary) between the workers in the department could be reduced because their political practices dominated their previous identities. Their political identity was recognized and became their primary identity over the others (ethnic identity, national identity, or gender identity).

Lastly, I illustrated the use of cultural capital or, more specifically, playing the lottery to reduce the boundaries between workers in the factory. Playing the lottery was a kind of practice that made the factory workers unconcerned about their diverse identities for a moment. They freely talked to other workers to exchange the numbers they had. The boundaries of the workers temporarily disappeared. All workers who played the lottery became a part of the group.

To conclude, a person, mostly, can be accepted as a part of the group when that person has the same cultural practices, language, beliefs, religion, political ideas, and interests as other members of the group. A person can be accepted as a part of the group if that person's "identity capital" can connect to the group's identity. However, from the first three stories I shared, they show that even though a boundary can be deconstructed, another boundary will be constructed/reconstructed. In my case, I used my identity capital, my Burmese language, to reduce the boundary between me and the migrant workers from Myanmar; however, it created a boundary between other Thai workers and me. The Thai workers saw me as an outsider or a Thai

worker who was close to the Burmese workers. In Soe Soe's case, her performative practices created a boundary between her and other migrant workers from Myanmar. Finally, in the case of using political capital, boundaries between the workers in the same department were reduced, but boundaries between workers from different departments were strengthened.

Moreover, identity capital cannot destroy the boundaries in all cases. For example, Aihwa Ong (1999) demonstrated how transnational Chinese had used cultural and symbolic capital, specifically the idea of Feng Shui and philanthropy, to navigate their life, to improve their social status, and to be more accepted to lay down their business in the new environment. In the case of transnational Chinese, some strategies cannot destroy social barriers. For example, "Fengshui-aligned locations cannot make up for their being out of place...in the American ethnoracial scheme" (Ong, 1999, 108).

Although bridging one's identity to the group's identity still has some limitations, based on my empirical study, cultural capital, specifically playing the lottery, unbelievably, effectively reduced the boundaries between the workers from different classes, ethnicities, departments, and genders in the furniture factory. The study also raises the question of how this effective outcome can be scaled up to society. What strategies or techniques can we use to reduce the boundaries between migrant workers from Myanmar and native-born people? What kind of identity capital will bridge the identity of migrant workers from Myanmar to the identity of native-born people? In the next chapter, I will suggest some answers to these questions.

## **Chapter 6. Mahachai: from a dangerous place to a possible touristic and educational area**

In June 2019, I went back to Samut Sakhon Province to meet Wah Khaing and other friends. We talked about how everything was going. They said everything was going the same as when I was working there except that numerous new workers were coming from Myanmar through the current workers' network. These workers were recruited by the current workers. Moreover, some Thai workers had decided to leave. Some of them decided to find new jobs while some decided to go back to their hometowns and engage in farming on their lands. The factory now has more migrant workers from Myanmar than before. However, the boundaries between workers in the factory still exist. Playing the lottery is still a main practice that helps workers from different groups connect. It is during those times that the migrant workers from Myanmar can deconstruct the boundaries and become a part of the group.

Despite this, the construction of Othering through space and state actors remains. Even though the current government has attempted to reduce the corruption on human trafficking and slave labor by expelling some corrupt officials in Samut Sakhon Province, migrant workers from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon Province are still exploited by managers of unease in the area. Wah Khaing told me on my last visit before I returned to the US that there was a day when her friend called her and asked her for help. A policeman had arrested her friend in the Mahachai area. Her friend could not speak Thai well; hence she called Wah Khaing. Wah Khaing went to meet her friend and spoke with the policeman. Wah Khaing said the policeman had arrested her friend because she did not have some document's receipt with her. The policeman claimed that her friend's document was illegal and thus wanted to arrest her. However, he also said that he would

set Wah Khaing's friend free if she paid him 1,000 baht (about 30 dollars). Wah Khaing and her friend decided to pay. Based on this story, it is evident that migrant workers from Myanmar, especially those who live in the Mahachai area, are still exploited by some state actors. These state actors still treat migrant workers as illegal people and Others, and these reiterative treatments affect the image of migrant workers from Myanmar. To people in Thailand who are unfamiliar with migrant workers from Myanmar, these state actors influence their perception to see migrant workers from Myanmar as dangerous Others and regard the Mahachai area as a dangerous place. Unless these people in Thailand personally interact or share feelings and practices with migrant workers from Myanmar, they will rarely change their minds; they would still think that the workers in Samut Sakhon Province are dangerous Burmese.

This dissertation shows how migrant workers from Myanmar are constructed as Other and how they can deconstruct the boundaries between themselves and people in Thailand. In chapter one, I provided information about Samut Sakhon Province or Mahachai, the biggest Burmese community in Thailand. Due to the development of major economic activities, such as fishing, agriculture, and manufacturing, in Samut Sakhon, the province provides numerous job opportunities for low-wage workers. Numerous migrant workers from Myanmar have moved to work in Thailand. Samut Sakhon Province has become the biggest Burmese community in Thailand, and it has become a borderland because of its cultural boundaries. After the migration of people from Myanmar to the Mahachai area, the cultural boundaries of Mahachai have changed. Many cultural boundaries have been created in this area, resulting in multiple identities and a mix of ethnic groups. Thus, Samut Sakhon Province provided a rich context to gain a broader understanding of ethnicity, boundaries, and migrant workers.

Additionally, in chapter one, I explained the overall concept of the dissertation. I grounded my dissertation from two concepts: space of encounter and identities. Apart from seeing Mahachai as a borderland, I also saw Mahachai or Samut Sakhon Province as a space of encounter where in-groups and out-groups met each other. Moreover, I also saw that the boundaries emerged in Samut Sakhon Province because people in the area had different identities and identities are performative. From these two perspectives, I investigated how the images of migrant workers from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon Province were constructed. I argued that migrant workers from Myanmar were being constructed as Other through three ways: space, perspective, and management of state actors and identities. Being constructed as “Other” led migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand to become economically and socially segmented and exploited at different scales. The dissertation was divided into three main chapters, excluding chapters one and two, where I mainly illustrated the background and my methods of study, each dealing with a particular way of the construction of Othering of migrant workers from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon Province, Thailand.

Chapter two gave readers some background and basic stories about migrant workers from Myanmar, such as the policies on migrant workers in Thailand and statistical data on migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand. According to statistics from the Office of Work Permit, Ministry of Labour, the majority of migrant workers in Thailand came from Myanmar and Samut Sakhon Province had the largest number of migrant workers from Myanmar, excluding Bangkok. Due to Thai policies and job opportunities in Samut Sakhon Province, migrant workers from Myanmar could come to work as unskilled laborers in Samut Sakhon Province since 1993. These

were some factors that had allowed Samut Sakhon Province to become the most populous Burmese communities in Thailand.

In this chapter, I summarize my methods of study. Since there are numerous migrant workers from Myanmar living and working in Samut Sakhon Province, I decided to live and work in Samut Sakhon Province for a year to study them. I also utilized four principal qualitative research methods for my research: participant observation, auto-ethnography, archival research, and semi-structured interviews. I did some archival research from May to July 2017 to gain background information on the issue. For participant observation and auto-ethnography, I went to work in two factories, a furniture factory and a textile factory. I used my social network to obtain work in the factories. While working in the factories, I tried to create my networks and become friends with migrant workers from Myanmar and workers from Thailand. I spent four months working in the factories. Apart from those months, I lived in Samut Sakhon Province and tried to contact local people and local officials to interview. I conducted many semi-structured interviews with some Thai government officials, some Thai people in Samut Sakhon Province, and some migrant workers from Myanmar from December 2017 to August 2018.

In chapter three, I explained the construction of “Othering” through space. I illustrated how Mahachai or Samut Sakhon Province had become the biggest Burmese community or a (dangerous) Burmese-ethnic niche in Thailand. Since there were numerous migrant workers from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon Province, migrant workers from Myanmar had transformed some of these areas in Samut Sakhon Province to create their own spaces. Outsiders, thus, viewed this place as a Burmese town. Even though transforming some areas in Samut Sakhon Province to

become their place made migrant workers from Myanmar feel comfortable, these spaces also led to more racism. Since outsiders saw Samut Sakhon Province as a Burmese town, they stereotyped all migrant workers in this area as (dangerous) Burmese, regardless of their real ethnicity.

What made this space become a pool for migrant workers from Myanmar, and why had migrant workers decided to come here? I used the idea of social networks to answer this question. Social networks are a significant factor persuading migrant workers from Myanmar to move and work in Samut Sakhon Province. Migrant workers from Myanmar significantly rely on their social networks to find jobs in Thailand. Information about Mahachai and employment opportunities in the Mahachai area is spread widely through workers from Myanmar who have been working or had previously worked in the Mahachai area. Moreover, employers utilize current workers' social contacts to recruit workers. Therefore, many migrant workers from Myanmar working in the Mahachai area were recruited through friends and family members who had also been working in the area. However, social networks of migrant workers from Myanmar are not the only factor compelling migrant workers from Myanmar to work in the Mahachai area. Geographical factors also affected the mobility of migrant workers from Myanmar to Thailand; many migrant workers from Myanmar decided to come and work in the Mahachai area because Mahachai was easy for them to access. Moreover, some migrant workers came to work in the Mahachai area due to social and cultural preferences, brokers, and accessibility. Many migrant workers preferred to stay and work in Thailand because of the educational opportunities and access to health care. Some preferred to live in the Mahachai area because of cultural and religious reasons.

I had outlined two main ways that migrant workers from Myanmar used to get into and work in the Mahachai area. First, migrant workers used brokers to get a job in Thailand. The second way was illegal entry through the Thailand-Myanmar borders. In addition to social networks being a significant factor compelling migrant workers from Myanmar to come to the Mahachai area, geographical factors, accessibility, social and cultural preferences, and brokers were other important factors shaping Mahachai to become the biggest Burmese labor market. Through the process, migrant workers became easily constructed as Other and exploited.

In chapter four, I demonstrated the construction of Othering through the managers of unease. I explained how managers of unease viewed and managed migrant workers from Myanmar. The managers of unease, in this case, referred to state actors, including central government officials, local government officials, police officials, immigration officials, populations in Thailand, and public and social media. They constructed migrant workers from Myanmar as Other and managed migrant workers from Myanmar by claiming that migrant workers from Myanmar were creating unease in Thailand. However, it was not always true that migrant workers from Myanmar were creating problems in Thailand.

On the contrary, they were repeatedly portrayed as Other and creators of problems so that the managers of unease could benefit from it. In other words, migrant workers from Myanmar were continuously discussed to and by the general public as aliens who were the source of problems in Thailand, not because they were creating problems, but merely because of the ways the state actors viewed and managed them. Different state actors viewed migrant workers differently. Some viewed migrant workers as a social and security problem, others viewed them

as people who could be exploited, and yet others saw them as people who needed to be organized.

In chapter five, I illustrated how migrant workers from Myanmar in a factory were constructed by others and how they constructed others through the idea of identities. More specifically, I explained the relationships and boundaries between the workers in the factories, including ways workers used to reduce the boundaries in the factory. Identities are basic elements dividing people into different groups and are constructed through performative practices. Since identities of migrant workers from Myanmar differ from those of people in Thailand, migrant workers from Myanmar are thus viewed and/or constructed as Other. However, identities are flexible and performative; changing practices can sometimes help one connect to others. In other words, identities can either create or reduce the boundaries between groups. In the furniture factory, the boundaries between the workers were constructed through their identities. Conversely, these boundaries were sometimes reduced because of the change of performances and the use of identity capital. These strategies were either intentionally or unintentionally used by the factory workers to reduce the boundaries between themselves since normal encounters in the workplace do not always reduce the boundaries between people from different groups.

### **Implications for research on ethnicity, boundaries, and migrant workers**

Previous studies on ethnicity, boundaries, and migrant workers from Myanmar have been studies from different disciplines. The studies have covered from the idea of identity and boundary (Buijs, 1993; Bhachu, 1993; Tilly, 2005; Dobrowlosky and Tastsoglow, 2006;

Dobrowolsky and Lister, 2006; Ralston, 2006; Tastsoglou, 2006; Peng, 2011; and Ho and Bauder, 2012), the idea of prejudice (Stephan, Ybarra and Bachman, 1999; and Powell, Butterfield and Parent, 2006), and the idea of ethnic differences and difficulties in the workplace (Wright, 1999; Kalev, 2009; Santoso, 2009; and Marr 2016). My research has also studied these issues. However, my dissertation has covered several issues that were scant in previous studies. First, most of the previous researchers focused on migrant workers who migrated from the global South to the global North. They usually explained how migrant workers from the global South negotiated their daily life and how they dealt with the difficulties they faced in the global North due to the distinct social, economic, and cultural differences between people from the global South and the global North. In the global South, many origin and destination countries of migration have some shared history and culture. More significantly, the physical appearance of people in the global South, such as in Southeast Asia, are not distinctly diverse. Theoretically, people from the global South who move to the global South should experience fewer difficulties than people who move to the global North. Perhaps due to this assumption, recent studies have focused less on the stories about South-South migration. My research on migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand helps to fill this lack. However, my research findings imply that even though people from the country of origin and the country of destination share some social and economic status and culture, migrant workers who move from the global South to the global South also face difficulties that they have to negotiate. Despite the similarities of people from the global South, some differences create separations. For example, even though many migrant workers from Myanmar and Thai people believe in the same religion, Buddhism, their beliefs and practices in Buddhism are different. As a result of this, migrants decided to build create their

own temples and invited monks from their country to these temples. They would rather go to their temples than Thai temples. With these differences, migrants and the native people in Thailand do not bond or become friends easily.

Other factors create hardships for migrant workers, causing them to live with difficulty in the country of destination. These factors, for example, are the differences of ethnicity and nationality between the workers, an antagonistic relationship in the history between the country of origin and the country of destination, negative images of migrant workers that are depicted in media and social media in the country of destination, and the benefits that some groups of people in the country of destination are able to gain from exploiting migrant workers.

Previous research has also explained the boundaries and prejudice between migrant workers and local people; however, they have rarely demonstrated how to reduce those boundaries and prejudice. In my study, due to migrant workers moving from the global South to the global South where they and the people in the country of destination share some cultural, social and economic similarities, I found a way that migrant workers used in order to reduce the boundaries between them and other groups of people in the workplace was connecting their shared social, political or cultural practices to the in-group's identity. These show that, in contrast to the study of migrant workers from the global South to the global North, the study of migrant workers from the global South to the global South is another aspect of concern worth researching.

### **Implications for research on geography**

Three geographical theories were used in this dissertation: social networks (C.3), managers of unease and domopolitics (C.4), and space of encounter (C.5). Here, I present some advantages and limitations of these theories. First, for the social network theory, the common argument in previous studies on social networks can be summarized as migrant workers' social networks playing an important role in creating an ethnic segmentation and division of labor. In other words, migrant workers' social networks affect migrant workers' decisions about work. Therefore, these social networks give rise to an ethnic niche or a national niche. However, previous studies have not given much consideration to other factors that might also affect migrant workers' decisions about work. In chapter three, I corroborated this argument but I also demonstrated four other factors (policies, job opportunities, social and cultural preferences, and brokers and accessibility) that support the creation of an ethnic niche in Thailand.

Bigo (2002) explained that there were three groups of managers of unease: the state, politicians, and security professionals. Different managers of unease will conduct the management of unease differently. Because Bigo's research on managers of unease was based on the western context, his managers of unease cannot wholly apply to the global South context. In the context of Thailand, the managers of unease refer to the central government, local governments, the media, social media, native Thai population, and security professionals, which can be concisely called Thai state actors. These actors have the power to organize and disrupt the formal instruments of governance and fully or partially manage unease. In accord with Bigo's research, the central government (which Bigo called "state") and security professionals are two main managers of unease in Thailand. These two actors have significant power to construct and manage the so-called producers of unease, such as migrant workers. However, Thailand's

political situation is different from the western context in that Thailand was deprived of democracy for many years. From 2014 to 2019, Thailand was ruled by the military government, who came into authority by the coup d'état in 2014. Presently, Thailand is still controlled by the government, which stems from the military government. Thai politicians have less power to manage unease, which differs from Bigo's explanation. Politicians are, therefore, not an important actor for managing unease in Thailand. Also, even though the military government would have powerful authority to control the country, they are closely scrutinized by some local, international, and social media since they undemocratically gained power. Due to recent scrutiny, the government became very concerned about their reputation and how the country's image is portrayed by the media. Different from Bigo's research, media and social media are considerable actors that could contribute to policy change and problem management. The general (native) population in Thailand is another state actor that can disrupt the policies regarding migrant workers. The Thai population plays an important role in constructing and reconstructing the discourse of migrant workers from Myanmar. This discourse supports the securitization of migration organized by other state actors. In a nutshell, Bigo's idea of managers of unease is adaptable and useful to analyze in the global South context. However, politics, economics, and society in the global South differ from the global North. In my research, I found that managers of unease can refer to different actors, and these actors have different levels of power from what Bigo explained.

Additionally, Walters' domopolitics can be applied to analyze migration issues in Thailand. Based on domopolitics, the state should be governed like a home where the host will only allow particular things to happen and particular people to enter. Uninvited guests cannot

come into the state. Similar to the idea of domopolitics, the Thai central government only allows certain migrants to come in and restricts others. Only documented migrants can come to work in Thailand. However, Walters explained domopolitics based on the central government's perspective in western countries. Domopolitics, therefore, cannot explain the reality in some other countries. For example, in Thailand, the state includes the central government, local government, and the state's population. Domopolitics is an idea used by the central government but not local governments. Many local government officials view migrants as a source of money. Because migrants are uninvited guests who want to stay in Thailand, many local governments exploit them for bribes; they are allowed to stay in Thailand only if they pay. Contrary to the idea of domopolitics, these local government officials do not see themselves as a host but as a toll collector. Domopolitics, therefore, cannot wholly apply to a corrupt state like Thailand.

Lastly, in chapter five, I responded to numerous researchers who have demonstrated that spaces of encounter, like the workplace, can produce social cohesion and resolve conflicts and hostility. I reflected on this idea and explained that it is true to a certain extent that spaces of encounter, like the workplace, can produce social cohesion and resolve conflicts. However, normal encounters in the workplace cannot always reduce the boundaries between people from different groups because workers in the factory can maintain their negative feelings and hostile practices while interacting with people from the out-groups. Therefore, strategies are required to reduce these boundaries. Previous research on spaces of encounter has a limited explanation on how to reduce the boundaries if normal encounters in the workplace cannot reduce the boundaries between people from different groups. Therefore, I investigated and illustrated the strategy that workers in a factory in Thailand have been using to reduce their boundaries. This

strategy is connecting one (or more) of our identities to the group's identity or what Côté and Levine (2002) called "identity capital". Therefore, in chapter five, I not only reflected on the idea of spaces of encounter, but also connected the idea of identity capital to the idea of space of encounter and boundaries.

### **Implication for research on migrant workers in Thai Studies**

Many recent studies on migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand have shown the stories and fundamental backgrounds of migrant workers in Thailand in general (McLaughlin, 2010; Atchawanitchakun, 2011; Latt, 2013; Ekachai and Kongchantuk, 2016) and in Thai-Burmese borderlands (Arnold and Hewison, 2007; Pongsawat, 2007, Eberle and Holliday, 2011; and Campbell, 2018) but no one has thoroughly explained the stories of migrant workers from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon Province. This dissertation, thus, shows that Samut Sakhon Province, the biggest Burmese community and a (cultural) borderland in Thailand, has largely been ignored by many researchers, and can contribute to a better understanding of migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand. Two critical findings that can be added to research on migrant workers in Thailand include 1) similarities and differences between Samut Sakhon and other Thai-Burmese borderland areas, and 2) empirical evidence on migrant workers' life and struggles.

First, migrant workers in Samut Sakhon Province and other Thai-Burmese borderlands, such as Mae Sot and Chiang Mai, are precarious and have been exploited by some local officials and employers. Dennis Arnold and Kevin Hewison (2007) demonstrated that migrant workers in Mae Sot face a range of suffering from employers and local officials, especially by the Thai

police. The Thai police are widely reported to be corrupt and engaging in abuse of workers. Therefore, migrant workers prefer to avoid the police and do not contact them for any assistance. Similarly, migrant workers in Samut Sakhon Province are confronted by many corrupt police officials. The police officials usually ask migrant workers from Myanmar for bribes if they meet the migrants. Therefore, migrant workers in Samut Sakhon Province attempt to find ways to avoid the police. For example, migrants would rather go to Mahachainiwet Market, a big Burmese market in Samut Sakhon Province, than to Mahachai Market, the biggest market in Samut Sakhon. According to interviews with migrant workers from Myanmar, Mahachainiwet Market's owner pays the police, therefore, police officials do not come to inspect migrant workers there. Moreover, Meghan Eberle and Ian Holliday (2011) explained that migrant workers both in Chiang Mai recognize their precarious status, but they economically, psychologically, and politically accept their status because they think it is futile to make demands. Like the migrant workers in Chiang Mai, migrant workers from Myanmar in the Mahachai area understand their living conditions; they recognize that they are exploited. However, they are fearful to resist. Therefore, precarity and abuse of migrant workers both in Chiang Mai and Samut Sakhon continue to exist.

Even though migrant workers in Thai-Burmese borderlands and Samut Sakhon face similar difficulties from different Thai state actors, the techniques these actors use to exploit migrant workers in Thai-Burmese borderlands are different from the techniques they use in the Mahachai area. Pitch Pongsawat (2007) explained that Thai and Burmese state actors use "border partial citizenship" or the Thai systems of Minority Immigrants and Registered Illegal Immigrant Workers from Myanmar as a form of regulations to achieve border surveillance and the creation

of the vulnerable in Thai-Burmese borderlands, such as Mae Sot and Mae Sai. Furthermore, Stephen Campbell (2018) illustrated that Mae Sot is an exploitable place in stripping the rights of migrant workers because of its geography. The Mae Sot area, a geographical border dividing Thailand and Myanmar, is used as a prime location to rule migrant workers and keep the low-wage migrant workers in the Mae Sot area. On the other hand, the Mahachai area is located in central Thailand; therefore, “border partial citizenship” strategy or geography of the Mahachai area does not support the state actors to exploit migrants. The state actors use different means, which is the construction of Othering to regulate and exploit migrant workers from Myanmar in the Mahachai area. Migrant workers from Myanmar in the Mahachai area are constructed as dangerous Others or illegal Others, and being constructed as “Other” leads migrant workers from Myanmar to become economically and socially segmented and exploited at different scales by different state actors.

Secondly, this dissertation provides more empirical evidence on migrant workers’ lives and struggles. Sai Latt (2013) illustrated that state and para-state usually extract financial resources from migrant workers. This extraction can be referred to as extortion. I extend on Latt’s work by providing empirical evidence of illegal extortion in the Mahachai area. The illegal extortion mainly occurs from the corrupt officers who ask bribes from migrants. This dissertation explains several ways that officers have been using to bribe migrant workers from Myanmar, such as accusing migrants as illegal migrants, prostitutes, or lawbreakers. Moreover, in addition to the use of social networks to gain access to learning centers and Thai schools in Thailand as explained by David Scott McLaughlin (2010), this dissertation illustrates the use of social

networks in order to obtain jobs in Samut Sakhon, which has made Samut Sakhon become the biggest Burmese community in Thailand.

### **Mahachai: a Burmese town for tourism and educational purposes**

After explaining the stories about migrant workers from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon Province, there yet remains a question that needs answering, which is how to reduce the boundaries between migrant workers from Myanmar and people from Thailand in the Mahachai area. In chapter five, I explained the way the workers reduced the boundaries between themselves; however, how can the deconstruction of the boundaries happening in a small workplace extend to a bigger space like the Mahachai area or Samut Sakhon Province? How can we adapt the strategy the migrant workers use in the factory to use in the city? To reduce boundaries between migrant workers from Myanmar and Thai people or to reduce negative feelings against migrant workers from Myanmar, an occasional or permanent space of encounter must be produced or provided. This space would help to lead, support, or teach people to connect their identities with people from other groups. I suggest either the government or private sectors (or both) create a permanent space or organize occasional events in the Mahachai area for tourism and educational purposes. For example, for tourism purposes, the local government or some private sectors might consider organizing events, such as Thai/Burmese New Year events, food festivals, or Buddhist festivals, in which people from different identities can share their practices and culture. In the event or festivals, they might organize games and raffles for the attendees. In reality, people from Myanmar and Thai people share many similar practices and

cultures, such as the Buddhist practice of throwing water during the Thai/Burmese New Year<sup>10</sup> and eating spicy foods. Therefore, in these events, it is possible for both people from Myanmar and Thai people to connect some part of their identities to other groups. This space would allow people from different groups to come and meet each other and learn about the other groups. It may be a space to reduce some boundaries between the attendees.

However, another problem that needs consideration is addressing the image of the space and the image of migrant workers from Myanmar. Migrant workers from Myanmar are viewed as dangerous in many Thai people's perspective, and the space of migrant workers from Myanmar is also seen as a dangerous place to live or visit. Therefore, even though the local government and private sectors may attempt to produce a space for connecting different identities, they (both migrant workers from Myanmar and Thai people) might not come to the event or festivals they organize. Therefore, the state actors need to promote these events and create a new image for the space of encounter. One way to do this is by using media and social media. Both Thai people and people from Myanmar use social media, especially *Facebook*. Moreover, as Valentine and McDonald mentioned, "practitioners should work with the media to present more positive images of minority groups" (2004, 9). Therefore, the local government and the private sectors might need to promote these events through *Facebook*, including finding some good pictures and words to create a new positive image of the space. They could hire some famous and influential *Facebook* users to promote these events.

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<sup>10</sup> Thai and Burmese New Year occurs in the same dates. Thai New Year (Songkran) is on April 13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> while Burmese New Year (Thingyan) is on April 13<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup>. Therefore, during these days, Thai people and Burmese people will celebrate. They also do some similar practices such as throwing water, paying respect to elderly people and drinking.

In terms of educational purposes, since negative images of people from Myanmar are created and recreated in the Thai educational system, these negative images must be removed from the educational system. Mahachai, viewed as a Burmese town in many Thai people's perspective, is a good place to be constructed as an educational area for learning about people from Myanmar. The government and local governments should consider designating an area in Mahachai to become a learning space for learning about people from Myanmar. In this space, people can come see how the people from Myanmar live, how they work, and how they came to this area. Additionally, the learners should be educated that there are different ethnicities in Myanmar and should not be generalized. Despite the different ethnicities and nationalities, we have many similar social, political, and cultural identities that we can use to connect to each other. Moreover, the learners should be taught to understand that even though there were conflicts between Thailand and Myanmar in the past, we are now interdependent. Many workers from Myanmar rely on jobs in Thailand. Simultaneously, the Thai economic system requires labor from Myanmar. More significantly, the government should support public schools from different provinces in Thailand to bring their students to this learning area to learn about people from Myanmar. These spaces, the permanent learning areas and occasional spaces for events, are spaces that Thai people from different parts of the country and people from Myanmar can share their identities and learn about diversity and differences. They could serve as a space to reduce some boundaries occurring between Thai people and people from Myanmar.

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