NEGOTIATION BORDERS:
EVERYDAY CORRUPTION AND IMMIGRATION POLICING IN MALAYSIA

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INTRODUCTION

August 2013 the Malaysian government launched its “biggest ever crackdown” on “illegal” migration. The goal of the operation was to “hunt down” and “flush out” 500,000 “unwanted foreigners” from the country (The Star, 28 August 2013). The crackdown was the final stage of a regularization program known as the 6P, through which the Malaysian government endeavored to register the growing number of irregular migrants in the country. When launching the crackdown Immigration Department director-general Datuk Alias Ahmad stated that “illegal” migrants had been offered the chance to register through this program but, as many had failed to do so, it was now “time for full enforcement.” He described the operation as “a cat and mouse’ game” for which the authorities were fully prepared:

We are aware that they [the migrants] know we are coming for them, and come Sunday, they will suddenly disappear. They can hide, but how long can they hide? This is not a one-off crackdown but a three-month non-stop operation throughout the country (cited in The Star, 28 August 2013).

When I arrived in Malaysia about one month later, the level of fear in the Burmese migrant community where I stayed during field visits was at an all-time high. But many migrants were also skeptical towards the government’s intentions; especially those who had stayed longer periods of time in Malaysia and for who internal border controls had been a reoccurring part of everyday life for many years. One man stated that while he had heard the government’s announcement that this time they “really wanted to catch illegal people [he emphasized really],” he wasn’t scared. “I have been here for five years. I know so many things about Malaysia, about the country, about their government”, he said. “So, I know that they will not really catch me. They just want to ask us for money. So, I don’t care. I believe that I can pay money to them and I will be released.”

The following paper departs from an interest in this latter statement, as it seeks to understand the role of corruption in the performance and production of the border – focusing upon the policing side of state border practices (Andreas, 2009). ‘The border’ is here not approached as a fixed territorial line at the edge of the nation state (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2007:xxviii), but rather as a “complex choreography of border lines in multiple lived places”

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1The Malaysian Immigration Act employs the term “illegal undocumented migrants”. In public discourse, however, the term “illegal migrants” (in Bahasa Melayu: pendatang haram) is most commonly used (Hedman, 2008). And, while
2While this was not the first time that Malaysia had launched a ‘crackdown’ on irregular migration (Garcés-Mascareñas, 2012; Nah, 2011), the size of this operation was massive. According to media sources it involved some 135,000 personnel from the Immigration Department, the Royal Malaysian Police, the Malaysian Voluntary Corps (RELA), the Armed Forces, Civil Defense, National Registration Department and local councils (ibid).
The border does not, as Parker and Vaughan-Williams (2012:729) have suggested, “simply ‘exist’”, but is “performed into being” through various rituals (Parker and Vaughan-Williams, 2012:729). The “borderscape” (Perera, 2007:206-207) described by the migrants interviewed for this study therefore derives its meaning from social interactions and is recognizable through the daily struggles to clarify who belongs and who doesn’t (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr (2007:xxvii-xxix)). Everyday corruption, this paper suggests, is one of the ‘rituals’, through which the border is performed, struggled over and contested in the everyday encounters between migrants and enforcement officers.

From the view of the state corruption can be (and mostly it) viewed as ‘a failure of governance’, what Nye (1967) also described in moral terms as “a change from good to bad” (see Jordan Smith, 2007:16). But we can also, as Anjaria (2011:58) proposes, learn something interesting about the practices of politics and citizenship through approaching corrupt arrangements “as ordinary spaces of negotiation”. This moves the analysis closer to an approach towards corruption as a “collective action problem” — focusing upon its structural rather than moral content (Lindberg and Orjuela, 2014:725). In a border control corruption removes, if only temporarily, the link between an enforcement officer (a border guard or a police officer) and the state (Lyne Madsen, 2004:180) — influencing the production, performance and permeability of the border. For irregular migrants the practice of bribery can thus be an important tactic: “although the police have caught you, you remain invisible to the state” (ibid). As such, bribery is a means by which migrants can (re)negotiate the inside/ness/outside(ness) of the border.

Malaysia is the key migrant receiving country in the Southeast Asian region, depending heavily upon the inflow of foreign labor to sustain key sectors of its economy (Kaur, 2010). Although accurate data is hard to come by, most estimates suggest that the number of migrants in Malaysia currently exceeds four million — out of which around two million have an “illegal” status (see for example Amnesty International, 2010). Malaysia’s response to large-scale immigration has been described as “enigmatic” (Nah, 2011b) — summarizing the two contradictory policy objectives of a) maintaining high levels of labor migration to sustain economic growth whilst b) “working towards the closure of border” (Garcés-Mascaréñas, 2012:64). The policy response towards in particular irregular migration has, however, become increasingly securitized (Arifianto, 2008). Emphasis in immigration enforcement has been placed upon border control through policing and major expulsion campaigns, and while the Immigration Department is formally responsible for handling immigration the Royal Malaysian Police has been granted extensive rights to arrest and detain anyone suspected of violating the Immigration Act (Nah, 2007; 2011a; 2012). The Malaysian Voluntary Corps (RELA) has further

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3 I borrow the term ‘everyday corruption’ from anthropological literature on corruption (see: Blondo and de Sardan, 2006; Jordan Smith, 2007) to mark an interest in low-level corruption (often referred to as “petty” corruption) — involving junior officials who demand bribes in exchange for tasks and services. However, while the terminology of the ‘everyday’ signals that corrupt practices may be ‘commonplace’, these should not be understood as ‘unregulated’ or ‘random’. Instead, as illustrated by Blondo and de Sardan (2006), everyday corruption is often ‘regulated’ and controlled according to a complex set of (tacit) rules and norms.

4 ‘Securitization’ is here broadly understood as the discursive and institutional processes through which migration becomes constructed as a security threat (Bourbeau, 2011; Ibrahim 2005) — typically involving an increasing emphasis in immigration enforcement upon border control through defense and policing (Huysman, 2006) and often accompanied by entry restrictions and the detention and deportation of irregular migrants (Boswell 2007; Kakryotis 2012).
been armed and assigned the task of assisting Immigration officers and the police in ‘dealing with’ migrants (Hedman, 2008). Irregular migrants have in this process also been criminalized and now face major punishments, including: fines, detention, imprisonment and caning (Nah, 2011a; 2012).  

In the sections to come we will direct attention towards how migrants perceive urban space as a “borderscape” and how they navigate this space through the practice of bribery. First, however, we will take a brief look at the research setting and methodology of this study.

A BRIEF NOTE ON METHODOLOGY
All the fieldwork for this study was conducted in the city George Town on the island Penang on the northwestern coast of Peninsular Malaysia between 2012 and 2014. Penang has long been a center for export-oriented manufacturing in Malaysia – and today it attracts many migrant workers to the factories in the industrial zones as well as the big urban informal economy. There is no data on the exact number of Burmese migrants currently residing in Penang, but in Malaysia as a whole the Burmese are often mentioned as the forth or fifth largest group of migrants. The majority of refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia also originate out of Burma/Myanmar. However, given that Malaysia does not recognize their refugee status they are only awarded a UNHCR card to protect them from deportation but they are not allowed to work (Nah, 2007; 2011a; b). In everyday life they therefore share many of the challenges of irregular migrant workers.

During the fieldwork, in-depth interviews were conducted with 31 Burmese migrants as well as an additional seven who were part of a larger group interview exercise. Out of the 31 individual respondents, eleven hold a regular status as migrant workers, 17 are irregular and two are holders of a UNHCR card. The legal status of migrants in Malaysia is, however, far from ‘stable’ and many migrants move in and out of a regular and irregular status during their stay in the country – mainly due to the fact that once they have arrived in Malaysia they have no legal avenue for changing their job (Nah, 2012). Faced with abusive labor conditions many therefore “run away” from their designated employers (Brandström and Franck, 2014). During regularization programs they may be able to obtain a new passport, visa and work permit, which they may end up losing once more (ibid). Amongst the respondents in this study the majority (19), and all of those who had entered the country regularly, had changed their legal status during their time in Malaysia – some of them up to six times. While many of the migrants were interviewed on several occasions and often for several hours, the interviews with police officers in George Town more often took the form of informal conversations – although it was sometimes possible to take notes.

Apart from the above-mentioned interviews, the empirical material consists of a large number of observations from time spent in homes, workplaces, shops restaurants and street-stalls, some “mental maps” of George Town drawn by the migrant respondents as well as interviews with NGO activists and lawyers.

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5 Caning was introduced through an amendment to the Immigration Act in 2002. In the six years that followed close to 35,000 migrants were whipped for immigration offenses (Nah, 2011a:139).
THE CITY AS A BORDERSCAPE

From the outset, the objective of this research project was to examine how migrants in Malaysia understand and maneuver urban space—and, in particular, how fear influenced their perception of and mobility within the city (see Franck, forthcoming). Turning to the geographical literature on ‘urban fear’, however, it soon became apparent that while such scholarship has brought forward important insights around the relationship between fear, social exclusion and mobility in urban space, it has had a tendency to be, what Varsanyi (2008: 30-31) calls, “territorially trapped” in the nation-state”. As such, it has left questions around non-citizenship and “illegality” largely outside the scope of inquiry. Legal status is, however, “an important axis of marginalization” (ibid) and it has also been found to produce a distinct way of understanding urban space and of navigating in the city (Greenburg, 2010:67; Holgersson, 2011). An important reason for this, as this study will illustrate, is that for migrants spatial strategies may not primarily be developed in response to the fear of crime (with which previous literature around urban fear has been much preoccupied), but rather in response to the fear of state institutional practices: public identity controls, roadblocks and raids towards their living areas or workplaces (Franck, forthcoming). Whilst conducting the fieldwork for this study it, for example, soon became clear that opened questions around the feeling of “safety” and “danger” in the city were interpreted as questions around where there was a “low” and “high” risk of ending up in an (internal) border control. Many made statements along the same lines as this woman, who responded to the question ‘Do you feel safe in Malaysia?’ by stating: “I don’t feel safe here. I am scared that a policeman will catch me. That’s all. The thing I am most afraid of is the police. Every time I see the police I am frightened.” The ‘urban geographies of fear’ described by the respondents were thus inextricably linked to the presence of the border within the city.

In the following section we will therefore take a closer look at how the respondents describe the presence of the border throughout the city. The section that then follows draws attention to how migrants navigate the city as a “borderscape” (Perea, 2007:206-207), through various “counter-strategies” aimed at avoiding arrests and deportation (Vigneswaran et al, 2010) – focusing particular attention to the role of corruption.

WHERE IS THE BORDER?

In order to investigate the migrants’ understanding of safety and danger in urban space, a number of respondents were asked to draw “mental maps” (Gould and White, 1974). This exercise basically consisted of the respondents’ being asked to draw a map of George Town – and to mark with a green color pencil the sites they perceived as “safe”, use orange for “semi-safe” and red for “dangerous”. As can be seen in Figures 1 and 2 below, these “mental maps” varied greatly in terms of detail and sophistication. Figure 1 features one of the most advanced and detailed maps, while Figure 2 provides a more typical one – in terms of illustrating how the migrants drew the city as comprising of a distinct and limited set of “nodes” between which they maneuvered in everyday life (Franck, forthcoming). What is interesting about these maps for the purpose of this study is, as already stated above, that the respondents’ marked places as “safe” or “dangerous”

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6 For a good overview of this field see the special issues: ‘Fear in the city’ in Urban Studies 2001; ‘The geography and politics of fear’ in Capital and Class 2003; ‘Scary cities: urban geographies of fear, difference and belonging’ in Social & Cultural Geography 2010
according to where they perceived that the risk of encountering a police control was the highest and lowest. This interpretation of the terms “safe” and “dangerous” was also visible in most of the interviews. Consider, for example, the following segment of one of the interviews:

**Question:** Do you feel safe here in Malaysia?
**Answer:** No, because I don’t have a passport. … Legal is safe. Illegal is unsafe.
**Question:** And, what does safe mean?
**Answer:** If you are legal you can go anywhere you want to go. Illegals cannot go anywhere even if they want to.

“So” is clearly difficult concept, and many of the migrants also objected to questions regarding “safe places” – as they argued that there were actually no places in George Town that were “really safe” for migrants, regardless of their legal status. An example of this can be found in the specification to the colors used in the map in Figure 1, where the respondent used green for places that were “Almost safe (But be careful)”. The sites marked green in this map, as well as in several others, was the flat (where the respondent lived) and inside the walls of the Burmese temple. As a difference to the other maps, however, this respondent also marked an area towards the Bayan Lepas industrial zone and airport as “almost safe”. He stated that this area was so densely populated with migrants that he did not worry of a control occurring here. He further marked his workplace and home (living area) orange – indicating a 60 percent danger of encountering a border control (in the form of a raid). Then used red for sites “100 percent dangerous” and shaded red for where there was a 100 percent danger of ending up in a control if you have a driving license. The latter is indicative of the fact that while migrants may be in possession of a passport and work permit, they are rarely (if ever) able to obtain a driving license (for more on this see below). A site marked red in all of the maps, and mentioned as the “most dangerous place” in George Town in most interviews, was Komtar. This is a shopping center located in the central parts of the city where migrants (both Burmese and others) go to remit money. To the Burmese community the bottom floors of the old Komtar building holds a particular meaning as the so-called “Burma shops” are located here – where people purchase Burmese foods, groceries and medicine. The police regularly perform raids and controls here – as well as in the nearby streets.

Clearly, legal status is important for the perceived presence as well as permeability of the border and the blue dots indicating “Always dangerous for all illegal [migrants]” scattered across the entire city space in Figure 1 is illustrative of this. But, as we will return to below, also those who were regular migrants expressed fear of encountering the police – and were therefore also cautious when moving about in public space.

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7 The "Burmese temple” is here a reference to a Burmese Buddhist temple located in the central parts of George Town where many Buddhist Burmese migrants go on a regular basis to pray and get spiritual guidance from the Monks who reside here.
Figure 1. A mental map of fear

Figure 2. A mental map of fear
What the empirical material conveys is an imagination of the border that corresponds directly with the “bodily movements” of enforcement officers (Mountz, 2011:65). That is: throughout the city the border is where police set up a roadblock or control peoples’ identities (or where the Immigration department and RELA perform a raid). Importantly, from the migrants’ perspective, this also means is that the way in which you can (gu)estimate where the border is (or will ‘appear’) is through your own empirical experience and/or through the sharing of knowledge with other migrants. This was, for example, visible in that the migrants that had more experience (who had stayed for a longer period of time in George Town) could indicate a number of places where the likelihood of the border ‘being’ or ‘appearing’ was higher (and lower). Others, who had recently arrived, or who rarely left the area where they lived and worked, could only identify a limited number of places where controls were likely to ‘appear’. An illustration of this is, for example, when the brother of one of the respondents arrived to George Town with a smuggler from Dawei in Southern Myanmar. His sisters, who had both spent several years in Malaysia, had set up a job for him in a restaurant. But, without experience of living as an irregular migrant and with no language skills he ended up being “caught” by the police on several occasions during the first month. Shortly thereafter the sisters made the decision to “send him” back to Myanmar – as they were not willing to pay the police any more money to have him released from custody (see below).

From the perspective of these migrants the border is thus far from “distinct” – but it is also not ‘everywhere for everyone’ (Salter, 2012). While the likelihood of the border ‘appearing’ may be greater in certain areas throughout the city, the likelihood of a migrant encountering it intersects legal, social as well as bodily status. As such, the border expands and contracts – and operates differently before different groups of migrants (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2007:xxix; see also Perea, 2007). Besides experience (both social and spatial), the migrants identified bodily appearance as a “risk factor”. There seemed to be a general agreement amongst those interviewed that “looking Burmese” was “more dangerous” when aiming to move “undetected” through the city (Franck, forthcoming). This was also confirmed in conversation with the local police. One officer, for example, stated that while migrants were sometimes “trying to be like us [the Malaysians] … they are not. Their hairstyle does not fit the way they dress; the colors are not right etcetera.” The possibility to move freely through the city was therefore radically circumscribed by the way that the body was “marked by foreignness” (Greenburg, 2010:70).

NAVIGATING THE CITY AS A BORDERSCAPE

Importantly, migrants are not mere spectators in border performances – but rather actively participate in bordering and de-bordering practices (Parker and Vaughan-Williams, 2012). While their subject-position may be one of subordination, they develop “counter-strategies aimed at avoiding detection and/or deportation” (Vigneswaran et al, 2010:465). One such strategy is to alter the patterns of mobility in everyday life: limiting the amount of time spent in public places, redirecting the routes traveled and carefully picking the modes of transportation. Another strategy is the sharing information and networking: posting electronic messages or sending text messages and making phone calls on where there is an ongoing raid or roadblock, telling newcomers which places to avoid at what hours and where there are nearby living arrangements that are safe and closer to your place of work, or making use of contacts that speak the language
or can provide funds in case you do “get stuck” in a control (Franck, forthcoming). In this section we will, however, take a closer look at one specific (although interconnected) ‘counter-strategy’: the paying of bribes to those assigned to guard the border, in this case the police.

While immigration policies in Malaysia have made migrants “detainable”, ‘imprisonable’ and ‘deportable’ (Garcés-Mascareñas, 2012:104), most migrants are also aware that there is a real possibility to negotiate arrests through paying police officers a bribe – or some “duit kopi” (literally “coffee money”) as it is popularly referred to in Malaysia. In fact, amongst the migrants encountered in George Town close to all had effectively (on one to many occasions) been able to avoid an arrest though paying bribes to the local police. For those who had not experienced being stopped by the police in a control, the answer to the question of what they would do in that situation was still along the lines of “I would try to pay to pay them money.”

The everyday nature of this corrupt arrangement between migrants and police officers (but see Blondo and de Sardan, 2006, note 3), can further be illustrated by the development of practices aimed at ensuring that the right amount of money was carried when moving about in public space. Several migrants explained that they deliberately avoided carrying “too much money” when leaving their house in order not to lose “too much” in an encounter with the police. But they also made sure not to leave the house without money to make sure that would be able to pay should a control occur. On one occasion during the fieldwork, my research assistant and me were going to make an interview in an apartment in a nearby house. One of the women in the flat where we stayed, who did not have a passport or work permit, wanted to accompany us. When we protested and argued that she should not take this extra risk and walk about late at night, she waved a 50 ringgit bill in front of her face and exclaimed: “Insurance!”

This form of ‘insurance strategy’ was not just individual but also ‘collective’. By that I mean that migrants utilize their networks if they get caught in a control without money, or need help bargaining with the police from someone with better negotiation and/or language skills. This is well known to the police, who will often ask migrants who cannot pay a sufficient amount in bribes to call their friends or their “boss”. This is captured in the story of this respondent:

One day when I was walking down the street I saw the police. At first I pretended not to hear them, but then they called for me again. They asked if I was from Myanmar and asked if I had a passport. I said no. They told me that ‘If you don’t have a passport you must get into the car.’ They asked if I had a boss, but I told them I did not do a job yet. They asked: ‘If you don’t have a boss then do you have any friends here in Penang?’ They said this because they wanted more money. But I didn’t even have a phone [to call someone]. They kept me in the car and they didn’t want to let me go before I had paid. ‘You must pay 500’ they said ‘try to think if you don’t have any boss or friend [who has money].’ I said that I didn’t. I said: ‘This is what I have got, if you want it then take it!’ Then they got annoyed and they let me go. I usually don’t have so much money in my wallet, so I only paid 80 ringgit [22 USD].

The amounts paid to the police in bribes varied greatly – and the respondents stated that they had been asked to pay from around 10 up to 2000 ringgit (from around 3 to 600 USD). The number of controls as well as the going rate to pay, however, fluctuates over time and according to the situation in the country. One of the field visits occurred right before the Malaysian national

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8 The migrants, however, basically agreed that although it was often possible to pay the police, this was not quite as easy with officers from the Immigration Department.
elections. At that time several migrants commented that controls were less frequent and that the price of bribes had decreased. During this visit one of the respondents, who had previously been stopped by the police on many occasions, happily announced that: “It’s election time! So, the police do not disturb the foreigners [now].” On the other hand, as the election was over, the government launched the massive crackdown on “illegal” migration mentioned in the introduction to this paper, which inflated the number of controls as well as the price of bribes. One man, who had just negotiated his release, told the following:

I was caught by the police yesterday ... I was eating in the Chinese food court and they came to the food court. They looked around and asked for my passport. I told them that I don't have a passport and then they said ‘You can’t stay here without a passport’ ... They brought us to the police station. In the police station we sat and could do nothing. They told us to call our bosses – but my boss didn’t come. Then I called a friend [of my boss], an Indian lady. She came to settle it for me. They wanted me to pay 2000 but I gave them 1500.

Speaking to police officers in George Town revealed that the price to be paid in bribes were different in the street relative to the police station. One officer explained that if you (or your “boss”) can settle the negotiation in the street you only need to pay the patrolling officers. If the migrant is brought to the police station, however, a payment needs to be made to all of the officers present in the station. Whereas the street rate may be between 50 and a few hundred – you therefore may pay several thousands in the police station.

While regular migrants do not face deportation, many still expressed fear of encountering the police. A key reason for this is that documented migrants are rarely in possession of their original passports (Brandström and Franck, 2014; Franck, forthcoming; Nah, 2012). The Photostat copy that they often carry is, however, not recognized as valid identification in police controls. Stopped by the police in the street, the respondents explained how they would either be asked to provide the original document through calling their “boss” (who was commonly in possession of it) or to pay some “duit kopi” in exchange for their release (Franck, forthcoming). One man explained:

They [the police] want the money. One time I was stopped and I only had the photocopy of my passport. The police wanted the original document so I had to pay RM50. Even if you carry your passport [the original] they want money ... like ‘Pay for my coffee’. Even if there is no problem they will make one up.

Another respondent stated that even though he was in fact in possession of his original passport he was still frightened when leaving the house: “Because, I mostly go out alone. I am scared of the police. I am scared that I must bribe them.” A similar sentiment was expressed by this woman, who explained that although she was now carrying a document stating that she had a applied for a passport and work permit she was still frightened of going outside: “Because the police will ask for money anyway – no matter if you have a passport or not.”

Several respondents further complained that police officers would keep the license plate numbers of motorbikes in order to stop them and ask for money. Asked if he had ever been caught by the police one respondent, for example, stated:
I cannot count how many times I have been stopped by the police. I ride a motorbike but I have no driving license and the police stops me and asks me for money. Mostly I pay 50 ringgit but sometimes I have been able to discuss my way out of the situation. Then I didn’t have to pay ... The police already have the number plates (of the motorbike) so they always stop me to get my money. Now the police only check for the driving license [at the road-blocks]. They don’t check the passports. They know that migrant workers don’t have a license. Then they can make a lot of money. The driving license is too expensive for us.

This was also confirmed by police officers who explained how patrolling officers often set up controls in sites where many migrants travel by motorbike. These controls are, however, not “proper” roadblocks – as this requires the presence of a certain number of police officers as well as particular equipment. The objective of these controls is, therefore, not to ”snatch” migrants without a passport (or other criminals, drunk drivers etc) – but rather to make some relatively easy money from migrants who drive without a license. In the same way, controls may be performed in sites where there are a lot of migrants (construction sites etc) – who will be willing to pay to avoid the “hassle” of troubling the boss (who is usually in possession of your original document) or, in the case of irregular migrants, to avoid arrests. Migrants are, one officer explained, fairly easy targets for extortion because they are ”frightened” and have a lot to loose from being arrested.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS
Contributions to the field of critical border studies, Parker and Vaughan-Williams (2012:728) suggest, have set out to “decenter” and problematize the border as a “taken-for-granted entity”. The following study has attempted to contribute to such knowledge building through scrutinizing the role of corruption in bordering practices and how this, in turn, influences the production of the border. Immigration enforcement in Malaysia has become increasingly securitized (Arifianto, 2008) – and the increasing emphasis upon internal border control through policing has transformed city space into a “borderscape” (Perera, 2007). Border controls are performed at various locations throughout the city. The border may thus ‘appear’ in the form of roadblock in a busy streets or come for/after you through a control in the food-court where you are eating or through a raid against living areas or workplaces. The way in which you can (gu)estimate where the border actually is therefore through learning to predict the movements of enforcement officers (Mountz, 2011).

Navigating this borderscape (with the aim of avoiding the border) migrants utilize a number of social and spatial strategies, which may be more or less successful depending on your social status and bodily appearance. Once you end up facing the border, a tactic used by many migrants is to pay a bribe, in an attempt to persuade the police officer to “look the other way” if you fail to present the valid documents for staying, working (and driving) in Malaysia. If the police officer accepts the bribe, the migrant is able to momentarily (re)negotiate the conditions of “illegality” and non-citizenship – and thus avoid arrest, detention, punishments and deportations or “the hassle” of troubling the “the boss” who is usually in possession of the original documents.

The case of corruption in internal border controls shows the inadequacy of approaching the border as a static entity, as the border is clearly “continually performed” (Parker and Vaughan-Williams, 2012) in the encounter between the migrants and police officers. Apart from influencing its permeability, corruption also has significant implications for the geography,
function and logic of the border. Whereas setting up a border control with the logic of protecting the state from “unwanted foreigners” produces a certain geography, the logic of setting up a border control to make money from migrants produces another geography. As such, corruption in relation to border controls is not just part of the performance of borders but also performative (Parker and Vaughan-Williams, 2012) for border politics more broadly – raising important questions around where and why the border is protected – and in whose interest.

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