

**TROUBLE IN PARADISE
ANALYZING THE EFFECTS OF INTERNATIONAL LOW-
SKILLED MIGRATION ON LOCAL WORKERS: A STUDY OF
KOH PHI PHI, KRABI PROVINCE, THAILAND**

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REQUIREMENTS FOR
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was submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies, Mahidol University
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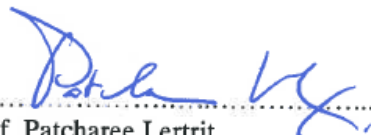
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Elizabeth J. Kolbe

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ABSTRACT

Although the study of migration and its impacts is not a recent phenomenon, the increasing globalization and interconnectivity of this world warrants a new perspective on the issue. Some countries wish to tear down metaphorical walls while other countries want to build physical walls, all in response to the same phenomenon, international, low-skilled labor migration. This year, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) launched the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), theoretically bringing with it not only the free flow of goods in the region, but also of skilled labor. Some critics feel that opening up the region to skilled labor mobility is not enough, and that the AEC should also allow for freer movement of low-skilled laborers in order to fill labor market demands and combat irregular migration.

Prior to opening the doors for the free movement of labor in the region, it is essential to understand the impacts that such movement can cause, not only for migrants but also for the local host communities and laborers. Scholars are still divided on the issue. Some insist that low-skilled labor migration is beneficial to local communities and laborers as it fills labor gaps and can lead to upward employment mobility for local workers. Other insist that low-skilled labor migration can be detrimental to the local workers by driving down wages and limiting employment opportunities as migrants compete with locals for jobs. While many of these scholars utilize national- and firm-level statistics to confirm their findings, no studies were found that addressed this issue using qualitative research methods at an individual level. This study utilizes a sequential qualitative research methodology to gather data from individual workers and host community residents to understand the possible impacts that such international, low-skilled labor migration can have on a community. Using an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) model, this study analyzes whether or not international, low-skilled labor migration has impacted the economic, social and/or cultural rights of the workers and residents of Koh Phi Phi, Krabi Province, Thailand.

**KEY WORDS: LABOR MIGRATION / ECONOMIC RIGHTS / LOCAL
WORKERS / TOURISM EMPLOYMENT / KOH PHI PHI**

79 pages

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: A ‘TSUNAMI OF MIGRANTS’ ON KOH PHI PHI?

“If we are not careful, only holidaymakers, governments, and big business will benefit from the new post-tsunami tourism. Our future ‘paradise’ holidays will be enjoyed at the expense of survivors who not only lost family, friends, their homes and possessions, but are also about to lose any hope of a future.”

~ Alison Rice (2005)

In 2014, 24.7 million¹ tourists visited the Kingdom of Thailand, many of them heading to the world famous beach resorts in the southern portion of the country. Located approximately 40 kilometers off the Andaman Coast of southern Thailand in Krabi Province, Koh Phi Phi is an idyllic paradise of white sand beaches, turquoise green seas as warm as bath water, lush greenery and beautiful mountains that shoot out of the waves, reaching for the sky. The island is a haven for scuba divers, honeymooners, rock climbers, and beach bums, along with the island residents, mostly Muslim Thai people, migrant workers, and a village of Mokken sea people. A book by Alex Garland that was later adapted to the Fox movie *The Beach* starring Leonardo Di Caprio helped bring the small island to its infamy (Forsyth, 2002:326), boosting its tourism numbers to over 1 million annually (Brix, et al., 2010:1). This booming tourism industry has brought many migrant workers to the island, both internal and international migrants, in search of work.

Thai Muslim fishermen “initially populated” the island in the late 1940s (Horn et al., 2006:12). While initial settlers made their living harvesting the abundance

¹ DPA (8 January 2015). *Tourist arrivals fall 6.6% in 2014*. Bangkok Post.

of sea life surrounding the island, the tourist boom of the sixties changed its landscape and the economic opportunities. Gilli states that “since the sixties, a touristic explosion [has occurred] with construction of hundreds of shops, hotels, bungalows and private houses to welcome tourists and the permanent employees (2010:80).” Tourism continued to boom through the nineties, and many entrepreneurs in search of economic opportunities to be gained from the tourism industry came to Koh Phi Phi².

On 26 December 2004, tragedy struck the island when an earthquake off the coast of Sumatra sent a tsunami raging towards its shores. The loss of life was great, not only to the residents of the island who were engaged in livelihood activities that support the tourism industry, but also for the thousands of visitors that were on the island that morning. On Koh Phi Phi alone, 692 people were killed, and another 500 to 1,200 people were reported missing (Horn et al., 2006:13). The material damage to the island was extensive. “Most of the buildings, including large resorts like Phi Phi Charlie Beach Resort and Phi Phi Princess, between Ton Sai and Lo Dalum Bays were destroyed” by the power of the tsunami (Horn et al., 2006:13). Koh Phi Phi suffered from “almost total physical destruction and many deaths and injuries (Rigg et al., 2008:139).”

The immediate impacts of the tsunami were non-discriminant, taking the lives of anyone in its path, however, the long-term impacts of the recovery process are said to have taken more of a discriminatory nature (Rigg, et al., 2005:141). Recovery assistance to survivors was delayed as the government scrambled to decide on redevelopment measures that could reshape the face of the island to cater to more up-scale tourists (Rigg, et al., 2005). Although Koh Phi Phi sustained the most damage of all the sites in Krabi Province, reports of aid and assistance being stalled or withheld are abundant. Rice commented that almost one year after the tsunami, many Koh Phi Phi residents were “being refused permission to return home. Government and big businesses have plans for the beaches – and the plans don’t include the people who used to live and work there (2005:5).”

Ten years later, the rebuilding process is still underway, and the evidence can be seen all over the island. New private construction projects as well as new public infrastructure is still being built today, changing the face of the island from what some

² Information gathered through personal communications with island residents.

have cited as a classic example of what happens when rapid overdevelopment is not countered with sustainability measures (Dodds, 2013:28-29; ANSAO, 2008:2), to what could be classified as a world-class tourist destination (Taylor, 2005). These progressive measures have not had positive effects on all stakeholders, as some local residents have reported³. The increased pressure on development and the need for more laborers have led to the increase in migrant workers on the island, as with many tourism destinations (see below). According to some local residents, this increase in migrant workers to fill the needs of the rapid rebuilding process and expansion of the tourism industry has led to low wages for local workers in sectors heavily filled by migrant workers, as well as the inability of finding employment and other social problems.

Alison Rice (2005:14) lists six ‘tsunamis’ that local Thai communities have suffered from, including: “1) the actual tidal wave; 2) disorganization and divisive aid agencies; 3) intrusive and insensitive press; 4) landlords threatening evictions with violence; 5) religious organizations trying to convert beneficiaries; and 6) researchers and NGOs collecting information without giving any information.” The possible effects of an increase in migrant workers due to the increased pressure to rebuild in the wake of the tsunami may constitute another, possible seventh ‘tsunami’ for local workers: economic displacement of local people through wage reduction and limitation in employment availability. If this is happening, this could be considered a violation of the right to work, as exemplified by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Articles 23 and 24 (see *Human Rights and Tourism Employment* below) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) Articles 6 – 8.

Tourism is often seen as a positive force of development in locations that may otherwise lack industries, and therefore, employment opportunities. Soontayatron (2014:7) states that “tourism development may create positive social changes as a consequence of improved economic prospects in host communities, for example, increased employment” and limited out-migration of skilled labor. One of the main beliefs of tourism development is that “tourism services are labor-intensive, so

³ Reported through personal communications between the researcher and Koh Phi Phi residents during previous visits to the island.

expansion of this industry will create jobs and improve income distribution (Kuljarus and Coxhead, 2008:929). Rontos et al. (2012:462) states that the “tourism industry is becoming the most important source of income and employment for the local economy, especially for island regions.”

The Roundtable on Human Rights in Tourism (RHRT), a “platform and driving force for the implementation of corporate responsibility⁴” consisting of NGOs and tour operators in the German tourism industry, goes as far as to state that tourism can be a “savior” for developing countries because tourism development leads to employment development and foreign direct investment into impoverished areas (2013). Shakeela, et al. (2011) finds that one of the biggest positive impacts of tourism is its potential to create jobs for those who may not have access to other job markets. According to Shan and Gupta, “there is growing enthusiasm amongst donor governments and international agencies for tourism to be viewed as having potential to contribute to pro-poor development (2000:1)⁵.” A model of tourism development, pro-poor tourism (PPT), has been created as a guideline to strengthen the tourism industry with a focus towards community participation, community employment and policy reform (Neto, 2003:9), although this model has not been implemented on Koh Phi Phi.

Although all of these studies and reports highlight the potential benefit that increased job availability can have for local people, there is no discussion about how this expansion of the job market can negatively affect local people (such as the shifting of resources away from traditional livelihoods) or how the potential increase in migrant workers in order to fill the ever-increasing labor market can affect local communities. In their analysis of the relationship between tourism and migration, Williams and Hall (2010:8) note that “tourism may also generate migrant flows. Most obviously this is through the demand generated for labor which, if it cannot be met locally, will stimulate labor migration.” Soontayatron (2014:2) states that “tourism attracts outsiders who are searching for work and economic opportunity.” Joppe (2012:665) explains that “the seasonal and cyclical nature of the [tourism] industry

⁴ Quote from Monshausen’s 2014 article entitled “Roundtable on Human Rights in Tourism” found on Tourism Watch’s website. Available at <http://www.tourism-watch.de/en/content/roundtable-human-rights-tourism>. Accessed on 2 March 2016.

⁵ Quote from Richard Tapper, Director of Fair Trade in Tourism Project, from the introduction of the Tourism Concern Report.

makes resorting to migrant workers an almost ideal solution for many employers, as they can expand and contract their workforce as demand fluctuates.” In Promsaka Na Sakolnakorn et al. (2013), local labor shortages are reportedly due to the rapid increase in jobs related to tourism booms. This shortage has “forced business owners to hire laborers from neighboring countries, including Burma and Cambodia (Promsaka Na Sakolnakorn et al, 2013:78). While the job creation potential of the tourism industry is undeniable, if this increased job market leads to high influxes of migrant workers that, according to some scholars (see *Impacts* below), drive down wages and take jobs from local people, it could be said that tourism job creation can also have negative impacts on the economic and social rights of local people.

The labor rights that this migration could be affecting include Article 23(1), (2), and (3), and Article 24 of the UDHR which refer to the ‘human right to work’. Article 23 refers to the fact that “(1) everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment; (2) everyone, without discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work; and (3) everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other social protection.” Article 24 insists that “everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitations of working hours and periodic holidays with pay (UDHR).” The RHRT identifies ways in which these rights are violated in the tourism industry, citing employment discrimination, tough working conditions and low wages (RHRT, 2013). RHRT also noted that the tourist industry also includes long hours where workers usually do not get enough leisure time (RHRT, 2013).

The UDHR is not the only international standard that highlights the right to work. The ICESCR also includes references to the right to work in Articles 6 – 8. Although Article 6 has been referred to as the ‘freedom from slavery’, it goes beyond the protection from slavery by stating that it is the States’ duty to provide “technical and vocational guidance and training programmes, policies and techniques to achieve steady economic, social and cultural development and full and productive employment under conditions safeguarding fundamental political and economic freedoms (ICESCR, Article 6)”. This article makes it clear that the duties of the State regarding

economic rights stretch beyond the freedom from slavery, but include investing in the economic security of its citizens. The State is also required to assure fair wages without discrimination, a living standard that reflects the needs of individuals and their families, guaranteeing enough rest and leisure time and protecting workers' ability to create trade unions, according to Articles 7 and 8 (ICESCR). As can be seen from the previous information given by RHRT, many of these basic workers' rights are being violated everyday in the tourism industry. States are required to do more than just protect freedoms, but are also required to step in and regulate industries that violate workers' rights. If labor migration related to the tourism industry is economically displacing local workers, it would be a failure of the State not to step in and regulate that labor migration.

The State is not the only entity that can violate a person's right to work. If big businesses and employers are hiring international migrant workers as a cost-cutting strategy to reap bigger profits by using cheaper labor, this could be considered a violation of workers' rights as listed in the UDHR and ICESCR, especially if this is leading to the economic displacement of local Thai workers. The high cost of living on Koh Phi Phi, of which basic necessities such as water and electricity are reportedly up to 80 times the amount as they are on the mainland makes the Thai national minimum wage of 300 baht⁶ very difficult to sustain an individual and his or her family. If these wages are low or have decreased due to the increase of migrants laborers on the island, this could also be leading to economic displacement as local workers look to other work to support their needs and their families on the island. If hiring migrant workers as a way to cut down labor costs and increase profits is leading to the economic displacement of local Thai workers, this is an issue that needs to be addressed by big business practices and government regulations.

This study seeks to identify the impacts of the increased presence of migrant workers on the local labor force as reported by local workers and their experiences through a two-part narrative questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. Does the increase in the ability of hiring cheap, low-

⁶ See Alexander, S., Salze-Lozach, V., and Winijkulchai, A. (30 January 2013). *Thailand Adopts Nationwide Minimum Wage Policy Amid Controversy*. The Asia Foundation. [Organizational Website]. Available at: www.asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2013/01/30/thailand-adopts-nationwide-minimum-wage-policy-amid-controversy/. Accessed on: 10 May 2015.

skilled migrant workers have an effect on the wages of local laborers on the island? Has an increased number of migrant workers affected local Thai workers' abilities to find employment? What adaptive strategies do local laborers and the host community employ to balance the effects of this migration? Negative sentiments towards migrant workers are found in almost every context in which migrant labor is utilized (see *Local Community Perceptions* below). Could these negative perceptions be leading to the rumors that local workers are suffering due to an increase in migrant labor availability? This study will utilize qualitative research methods in order to identify the impacts of immigration on the local labor force and the community of Koh Phi Phi. Koh Phi Phi offers a unique context in which to analyze the effects of labor migration for a variety of reasons, including a limited labor force that necessitates the use of migrant labor, a small, tourism-driven island economy, and limited avenues for occupational mobility due to limited industry on the island. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing knowledge on the impacts of international, low-skilled labor migration on a local work force.

1.1 Statement of Research Problem

Currently, there is a wide variation in the literature on the impacts of immigration on the local labor force (see *Impacts* below), but most studies do not question the local laborers themselves on the effects that migrant labor has on their livelihood opportunities and other economic, social and cultural rights. Many studies focus on firm-level and national-level statistical data to conclude whether or not they find immigration to have any significant effects on local workers regarding their wages and employment availability, but scholars do not yet agree on an answer. These studies influence policy-makers who make important decisions that affect real people in real ways. By not including the voices of local workers themselves, immigration policies can be misinformed as to the effects of immigration on a labor force, leading to policies that are potentially harmful for local workers and their families. By including this voice in the discourse through this research, it is the aim of this study to provide a more holistic approach to the understanding of immigration and its effects.

1.2 Research Objectives

- To identify if local Thai workers are being economically displaced and why.
- To analyze whether an increase in migrant workers has had effects on the Thai workers in the local labor market.
- To identify which sectors of the labor market have or have not been affected by the presence of migrant workers.
- To understand the social, cultural and economic impacts of immigration to the island.

1.3 Research Questions

- How do local workers and host communities experience the effects of international low-skilled labor migration?
- In what ways are the economic, social and cultural rights of local workers and host communities being affected by this immigration?
- What strategies do local workers and host communities utilize in order to balance or overcome these effects?

1.4 Conceptual Framework – What Are We Looking At?

The subjects of this qualitative study are the local laborers and residents of Koh Phi Phi. Originally, the term ‘local worker’ was to mean Thai persons having lived on Koh Phi Phi for at least a year or more. During the course of the research it was decided to expand the definition to include all Thai people, including those that had just recently moved to the island as they could also provide valuable information on the subject of immigration to the island. The scope of this research does not allow for an understanding or differentiation between internal migrants from other regions of Thailand and ‘indigenous’ laborers. The main reason for this lack of differentiation is

the complex Thai migration to the island, in which most Thai residents, even long-term residents with residency of 20 or more years, were not born on the island.

‘International, low-skilled labor migration’ refers to the movement of workers of low education and skill level from one country to another country and being employed in that country. Originally, this study was to focus on international, low-skilled migrant workers from Myanmar as they represent the largest group of migrant workers on the island however, during the course of field work, it was made obvious that Western workers also occupied a large portion of the labor market. It is for this reason that the researcher felt it was necessary to broaden the scope of the research, and therefore the concept of international, low-skilled labor migration on Koh Phi Phi to include countries, professions and employment situations that may not have been previously considered.

‘Tourism employment’ refers to employment in sectors that cater to and are dependent upon the tourism industry. This concept refers to the majority of the jobs on the island. Tourism employment includes occupations such as hotel work, restaurant work, bar work, tour and travel guide work, and transportation, to name a few (for the complete list of occupations analyzed in this study, see *Findings* chapter).

Although an increasingly large issue in Thailand and the region, and an issue that was brought forth by many participants in this study, no differentiation was made between fully legal ‘regular’ migrants and ‘irregular’ or ‘undocumented’ migrant workers. The researcher felt that it was unnecessary to analyze this issue as the focus of this study is on the impacts of international, low-skilled labor migration on local workers and host communities, and these impacts are felt (or not felt) due to the presence of migrant workers regardless of their legal status.

1.5 Methodology and Theoretical Framework – Empirical Phenomenology and Interpretive Phenomenological/Thematic Analysis

The focus of this study is on the local workers themselves and their experience of the effects of international, low-skilled migration and therefore

qualitative research methods such as those found in the empirical phenomenological approach and interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) are employed to analyze the data produced from the study. Empirical phenomenology and IPA provide a method of studying a phenomenon or issue itself as the participants experience it, thus placing subjects studied into real-lived experiences. This framework will allow the voices and experiences of the local workers and residents to speak for themselves as to the lived impacts of international, low-skilled labor migration to the island.

Phenomenology is “a call for a return to the perceptual world that is prior to and a precondition for any scientific conceptualization and articulation (Zahavi, 2008:664),” insisting that the way people experience an issue is just as important to our understanding of the issue as is data gathered from other research methods. Going ‘back to the things themselves’ requires a setting aside or ‘bracketing’ of scientific knowledge and theories in order to understand things as presented by the participants themselves (Lin, 2013; Zahavi, 2008; Morgan, 2000; Aspers, 2009). It is the researcher’s duty to connect the first-order constructs illustrated by the experiences told by the participants to the second-order constructs which apply theories and other knowledge to the issue being studied.

Alfred Schutz, the pioneer of applying phenomenology to the social sciences, emphasizes that “the goal of the social sciences was to understand the ways that people understand and function in the everyday world⁷.” Lin (2013:470) finds that phenomenology is “powerful when the study goal is to explore a concept loaded with social and cultural meanings especially when the topic does not render itself easily to quantification, and when new and fresh perspectives are needed.” While many scholars have attempted to quantify the effects of labor migration on native workers (see *Impacts* below), this quantification only takes into account statistical data on wages and employment availability, and thus, other impacts are left unexplored. Also, to date, the researcher has not found a study on the effects of labor migration on the native labor force as told through the voices of that native labor force. According to Lin’s analysis, empirical phenomenology would be very beneficial to the study of possible rights violations brought upon local workers due to increased migration, as

⁷ Paraphrased in Shank, G. D. (2002). Qualitative Research: A Personal Skills Approach. Merrill Prentice Hall: Columbus. p. 81.

this study not only offers a fresh perspective on how international, low-skilled labor migration can affect the economic, social and cultural rights of the local work force, but also allows for those participants to highlight issues and factors that may affect strategies employed by participants in the face of increasing migration, which, in many respects, is non-quantifiable.

The sequential qualitative research methods that were used in this study include a two-part narrative questionnaire distributed to both local Thai workers and migrant workers from Myanmar, semi-structured, in-depth interviews and focus groups with both local Thai and international migrant workers. Although this research focuses on the effects of international, low-skilled labor migration on the local Thai workers and community, the researcher felt that it is necessary to include the voices of the migrant workers, to a certain extent, in order to better understand the situation of labor migration on the island, as well as the reasons why migrants are coming to the island. Later in the research, when it became clear that the local Thai people were also affected by Western migrant workers, the researcher had thought to give out the questionnaire in English as well, but with the response rates of the questionnaire and time constraints, the researcher felt it was better to conduct interviews with those migrant workers rather than administering the questionnaire to them.

The questionnaire consisted of two questions:

1. *How have you experienced international, low-skilled labor migration on Koh Phi Phi?*
2. *What strategies do you use to balance or overcome the effects of that migration?*

It was the researcher's goal to keep the questions as unbiased and as vague as possible in order to illicit the feelings and experiences of the participants themselves without influencing the responses. This strategy seemed to fail, at least in regard to the Thai responses. Out of the 50 Thai questionnaires the researcher distributed, only 21 were completed and collected, indicating a 42 percent response rate. This response rate seems high, although it must be taken into account that questionnaires were selectively distributed after an explanation of the research objectives and the distribution of the participant information document explaining the participants' role and rights in the research. Comparatively, the researcher distributed

20 questionnaires to migrant workers from Myanmar, and collected 12 completed questionnaires, indicating a 60 percent response rate. It should also be noted that while more than two-thirds of Thai respondents simply indicated that they had contact with migrant workers in the work setting or that they had no problem with migrant workers other than they felt they needed to be here legally, many of the responses from the Myanmar migrant workers were very lengthy, speaking to why they came to the island and how they got to the island. The differences in response rates and length of responses may be due to the fact that all migrant workers have *direct* experiences with international migration, whereas not all local Thai residents may have *direct* experiences with migrants.

Phenomenology focuses on depth rather than breadth (Smith and Osburn, 2003) and therefore requires a smaller sample size and long interviews with participants in order to understand the phenomenon in question. Upon completion of the analysis of the narrative questionnaires, the researcher interviewed three local Thai key informants as well as three Myanmar migrant workers. Key informants were sought using snowball sampling. Later in the research, Western migrant workers were also sought for key informant interviews. After completing the key informant interviews, the researcher interviewed two local Thai workers in each of the twelve business categories as listed by the Phi Phi Island Tourist Business Association⁸, utilizing the themes that were drawn from the narrative questionnaires. These themes include migrants take jobs, migrants do the jobs that locals do not want to do or cannot do, low wages in the tourism industry of Koh Phi Phi, crime and other social problems caused by migrants, and the attitudes of migrants towards local people. Purposive sampling was utilized in order to find participants in each of the identified business categories.

During the course of the research it was made obvious that the voices of the workers only were not sufficient to understand the impacts of international, low-skilled labor migration to Koh Phi Phi. The voices of business owners, employers and other community members were also added into the analysis of the effects of this migration on local workers and the host community. Due to the different levels of

⁸ These sectors include travel and tour agencies, tattoo shops, salons and massage shops, bar, restaurants, mini-marts/bucket shops, dive shops, hotels/accommodations, souvenir stalls, clothing shops, boat operators and touts.

formality of the interviews, a definite number of interviews is difficult to state, though over 40 interviews would be an approximate. After key informant and respondent interviews were completed, expert interviews were sought with members of the Koh Phi Phi Police Department and Krabi Immigration in order to shed more light on the migrant situation on the island.

Finally, three focus groups were conducted with Thai laborers, migrant laborers, and owners/employers in order to understand the situation of labor migration and its impacts on the island. The data collected from these sessions helped to triangulate and validate the data received from the other qualitative data collection methods employed in this study.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

Although Koh Phi Phi does offer a unique context in which to study the impacts of migration on a local labor force, its context does limit the applicability of the research to other contexts. The sheer force of the tourism industry on Koh Phi Phi influences its employment and migration patterns differently than in other contexts, therefore the research could only be directly applied to similar situations. Even though the context limits its direct applicability to other circumstances, the knowledge gained from the reported effects of immigration by the local labor force will produce valuable insight into its potential impacts.

1.7 Contribution to Knowledge – What Will We Learn?

This research seeks to give a voice to local Thai laborers themselves as to the experienced effects of immigration. In this way, this research will add to the empirical knowledge guiding the debate on immigration. It is hoped that this research will contribute beyond the analysis of statistical data, and will influence policy-makers in their decisions about immigration policy, and perhaps other areas, including sustainable tourism development and pro-poor tourism.

There were no other studies found in the preliminary review of the literature conducted in preparation for this thesis research that sought to identify

potential impacts of immigration on local workers from a worker's perspective. All other studies found thus far instead focus on statistical calculations of potential impacts of immigration at a national- or industry-level. By bringing the research down to the level of individual workers and their experiences, it is the goal of this research to contribute to a grounded theory of the impacts of immigration on native laborers.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW: UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS OF INTERNATIONAL, LOW-SKILLED LABOR MIGRATION IN THAILAND

In order to properly study the impacts of international, low-skilled labor migration on the economic, social and cultural rights of local workers and residents of Koh Phi Phi, it is important to be aware of not only the reported impacts that labor migration can have on local workers, but also other supporting knowledge, such as the labor migration situation and legislation in Thailand and the perceptions of local people of migrant workers, which seem to echo the sentiments of many nativists in the world. Although phenomenology requires a bracketing of the scientific knowledge while conducting qualitative research, the following literature was used to connect the empirical data collected on Koh Phi Phi to the existing debate, and helped frame the analysis found in Chapter Four.

2.1 Impacts of Migration on Local Workers

There have been many studies conducted analyzing the impacts of labor migration on the local labor force by computing statistical data gathered at different levels (Foged & Peri, 2014). In their study, Foged and Peri use longitudinal employer-employee data in order to understand the possible effects of labor migration on local workers, seeking answers to questions such as “do immigrant displace similar native workers?; do [immigrants] increase [native workers’] jobless rates?; or do [immigrants] complement [native workers] (2014:2)?” Since the goal of this research project was to understand and answer those same questions using qualitative research methods, Foged and Peri’s study was consulted to better understand the potential impacts of migrant labor on a local labor force.

The goal of Foged and Peri's work is to see if migrants "crowd out" local workers by saturating the local labor market (2014:3). The economic canonical model of immigration suggests that as migrant laborers move into a labor market, they begin to displace local workers if they compete for similar jobs (Foged and Peri, 2014). "Considered as a labor supply shock, within the labor demand-labor supply 'canonical' framework," this increase in the potential labor force supply would drive down demand for labor, leading to lower wages for workers (Foged & Peri, 2014:5). Their study suggests that instead of displacing local workers, labor migration can often lead to upward employment mobility for local workers that can result in higher wages and better working conditions for those local workers that take advantage of the situation (Foged & Peri, 2014). They acknowledge, however, that not all benefit from an increased number of migrant workers, stating that "immigrants generate an opportunity for natives; those who take advantage of it by upgrading skills gain, while those who do not may lose (Foged & Peri, 2014:27)."

In Peri's (2014) analysis of 27 different studies concerning the impacts of labor migration on the native work force, he found that "most studies for industrialized countries have found no affect on wages, on average, and only modest effects on wage differentials between more or less educated immigrant and native workers (Peri, 2014:1)." Peri suggests that "alternative mechanisms for wage adjustments" are not considered by the researchers that find a negative relationship between native wages and the presence of migrant workers (Peri, 2014:9). These mechanisms include new employment opportunities created in order to manage migrant workers, native migration due to the increase in migrant workers, and upward employment mobility (Peri, 2014:8). Peri states that when these adaptive strategies are considered, labor migration produces little effects for the native labor force. Other researchers, including Chassambouli and Palivos (2013), found similar findings to Peri's (2014). In their study, they allowed for the "presence of differential unemployment gains/costs between natives and immigrants, which serves to explain the equilibrium wage gap between otherwise identical native and immigrant workers (Chassambouli and Palivos, 2013:20). The study suggests that, because of a lack of other employment options (especially in their native regions or countries), migrant workers are more willing to accept sub-standard wages that natives workers often refuse (Chassambouli and

Palivos, 2013). While Chassambouli and Palivos suggest that there may be benefits to native workers resulting from an increase in migrant workers, they do not identify what, if any, those benefits are or under what circumstances those benefits appear. They conclude by stating that, with the increased presence of migrant workers on a local labor market, “the overall impact on the wages of unskilled natives to be negative (Chassambouli and Palivos, 2013:20) or unaffected.

Although the previous studies (Foged and Peri, 2014; Peri, 2014; Chassambouli and Palivos, 2013) find that labor migration had relatively little effect on native workers, and in some case, could have positive impacts on native workers, other researchers are more hesitant about the stated benefits of labor migration on the local labor force. For example, de Haas (2010:31) finds that “a bias towards migration and development success stories might obscure situations in which migration did contribute to worsening underdevelopment,” both in host countries and in origin countries. The International Organization of Migration (IOM) Thailand, lists potential negative impacts of labor migration on the local people and workers, stating that “benefits of migration accrue to employers and migrants themselves while Thai workers experience a net loss owing to reductions in employment and opportunities and marginally lower wages (IOM Thailand, 2011:xiii).”

Borjas is another critic of the impacts of labor migration on a local labor market and its workers. He states that “the textbook model of a competitive labor market predicts that in immigration influx should lower the wages of competing factors,” even though he highlights how many studies report only a slight impact of immigration on the wages of native workers (2003:1337, 2004:1). His study that analyzes US Census data between the years of 1980 and 2000 finds that “the evidence consistently suggests that immigration has indeed harmed the employment opportunities of competing native workers (Borjas, 2003:1337).” He states that other researchers often ignore the phenomenon of native migration spurred by an influx of migrant workers into an area (Borjas, 2003:1339), or what Peri calls the “skating-rink” effect (Peri, 2014:5). Although Peri calls this phenomenon an ‘alternative mechanism for wage adjustment’ that leaves a labor market relatively unchanged in the face of increased migration due to native workers emigrating from the area in response to the migrant increase, leaving an employment gap that is then filled by more migrant

workers (2014), Borjas cites this as a defence mechanism used by native workers as they “respond to the wage impact of immigration” in their local labor market, and this involves “moving their labor or capital to other cities (2003:1351).” Borjas’ research finds that “immigrant influx reduced the wage of the average native worker by 3.2 percent (2003:1372)¹. This analysis leads Borjas to champion an immigration policy that reduces the supply of labor “by strict immigration enforcement and reducing legal immigration,” which he feels would “increase the earnings of native workers (2004:1).”

Citing neoclassical economic theory, Massey et al. (1994:701) states that labor migration should exert “downward pressure on wages in destination countries and upward pressure on wages in sending countries until equilibrium is reached.” Some studies that the group analyzed did reach this conclusion, however in other situations in North America that the group analyzed, wages did not decrease as a result of the presence of migrant workers.

Even though these studies thoroughly highlight both sides of the debate concerning the impacts of migrant workers on local workers’ economic rights, all studies fail to take the debate to the individual level by asking local workers themselves how this migration has affected them and their abilities to find work. Not only do these studies fail to consult local laborers and residents, they all fail to identify what, if any, social and cultural rights that can be affected by such labor migration, rights that are ultimately linked with other economic rights. The loss of wages and employment opportunities affects the available funds families have for their livelihood choices, including education and healthcare decisions. This study seeks to correct this neglect of local workers’ and residents’ voices towards the impacts of migration on their lives, and in doing so, add to a more holistic understanding of such impacts.

2.2 International, Low-Skilled Labor Migration in Thailand

¹ Borjas breaks down his findings by education level, indicating that wages for high school dropouts fell by 8.9 percent, wages for college graduates fell 4.9 percent, wages for high school graduates fell by 2.6 percent, while workers with only some college did not seem to suffer from any major changes in wages (2003:1372).

Low-skilled labor migration is prevalent in Thailand, especially of laborers originating from the neighboring countries of Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos PDR. According to the IOM Thailand, more than 3.5 million people are living in the Kingdom of Thailand that do not hold Thai nationality including more than 3 million people who are working within the country (2011). As Vasuprasat (2008:2) states, “wide economic disparity, labor market imbalances between the countries [of Thailand and its neighbors], and the undeveloped labor migration regimes have all inevitably contributed to cross-border labor movement, especially irregular migration.” Pholphirul (2012a) agrees that economic disparities between Thailand and its neighbors are a primary motivation for the international migration of low-skilled workers. There are many ‘push’ (conflict in origin country, lack of economic opportunities, etc.) and ‘pull’ (better economic opportunities, personal liberties protected, etc.) factors to consider when analyzing the motivations of immigrants to come to Thailand (*see Sanganet, 2004*).

Laborers from Myanmar account for almost 80 percent for the foreign laborers found in Thailand (Sanganet, 2004). Sanganet states that “pressure to migrate is exacerbated by the demand for cheap labor, which is caused either by labor shortages in natural resource-based economies or by the existence of socially undesirable (to nationals) jobs (2004:14).” He continues by stating that migrant workers are “willing to do work that nationals refuse to do or at a wage unacceptable to nationals (Sanganet, 2004:14).”

Thailand currently has agreements with three of its neighboring countries regarding international, low-skilled labor migration (Laos People’s Democratic Republic (Laos LDR), Cambodia and Myanmar), and soon, a fourth agreement with Vietnam will be finalized. These agreements, or Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs), were written and enacted as a measure to cut-down on irregular migration into Thailand by regularizing the recruitment procedures for foreign workers (Vasuprasat, 2008; Thailand, 2011; Pholphirul, 2012b). Although well intentioned, Vasuprasat highlights the fact that a “MOU is merely a statement of intent and not legally binding (2008:1).”

The MOUs are intended to regulate the “co-management of migration in recruitment costs, shortening of recruitment time, and the protection of migrants from

exploitative practices,” but many people have criticized the slow implementation time of the legislation, including Vasuprasat (2008:2). He also notes that thus far, the focus has been more on regularizing irregular migrants from those three countries that are already in Thailand, rather than on standardizing procedures for recruitment of foreign workers (Vasuprasat, 2008:4). Vasuprasat also analyzes the effects that the new recruitment procedures and regulations have on the willingness of potential workers and employers to utilize the legal recruitment route. Such regulations, such as the requirement of a 15 percent ‘compulsory savings fund’ that requires foreign workers to sacrifice a portion of their salary to the Thai government as a way of insuring that migrants return back to their home countries may be negatively affecting the amount of employers and migrant workers that are willing to go through the legal channels in order to secure work in the country (Vasuprasat, 2008).

Not only are the current procedures a hindrance to those seeking legal employment in the country, the contracting governments, especially in regards to the Myanmar government, have been slow on upholding their agreements. Myanmar has been slow to set up Nationality Verification (NV) sites for their citizens living in Thailand, and this has led to a reduced number of migrant workers from Myanmar taking advantage of the regularization process (Rukumnuaykit, 2009; Mon, 2010). Not only is the Myanmar government failing its obligations to verify the nationalities of citizens in a timely manner, Mon (2010:37) also highlights the Thai government’s failure to listen to the needs of the Thai employers, who, in 2004, requested almost 1.6 million additional migration workers. It is apparent that a lack of cooperation and understanding is leading to the failure of these MOUs to combat irregular labor migration into Thailand.

Knowledge of the Thai immigration policy is important to any understanding and analysis of how this migration affects the local workers and residents in the country. Scholars and activists have criticized Thailand’s failure to secure the rights of migrant workers in the country over and over again, but rarely are the impacts of the same migration on the local Thai workers and residents considered. When they are, as briefly illustrated above, they often only use calculations of statistics to base their conclusions. This study will seek the voices of those local workers and residents to illustrate potential impacts of this labor migration on their

livelihoods. If it is found that this migration is having an effect on the local workers, the Thai Government could be at fault for what some critics find a ‘weak labor migration regime.’

2.3 Local Community Perceptions of the Impacts of Immigration on Host Communities

Although the impacts of international, low-skilled labor migration on the local workers and residents in Thailand and other countries around the world are still inconclusive, members of the general public have generated their own opinions and perspectives of migrant workers in their countries. In general, most researchers identify negative attitudes of local workers towards migrant workers. Cholewinski and Taran (2010:12) state that “migrants become the first to be blamed; they are the scapegoats for unemployment insecurity, crime, and even rising disease and ill health.” King (2012:7) states that immigrants are scapegoats “for the ills of the society they seek to join – like crime, drugs and unemployment.” Peri (2014:2) states that “many people had the belief that immigrants ‘take jobs’ from the native labor force in industrial countries; that they crowd out job opportunities; and that they depress wages.” The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) summarizes these globally found fears by highlighting that “it is widely believed that while these migrants fill vacant jobs they also displace local workers and reduce wages. Other concerns posed by migrant flows include heightened risk of crime, added burdens on social services, and the fear of losing social cohesion (2009:7).”

There are many theories that try to explain attitudes of local individuals and host communities towards migrants, including individual and collective theories. A study by Paas and Halapuu (2012:1) determined that the attitudes of native individuals varied depending on three variables; “1) the personal characteristics of the respondent; 2) the country’s characteristics; and 3) the attitude of people towards country institutions and socio-economic security.” They identify different theories of natives’ attitudes towards migrants that were supported by their empirical data. Individual theories of attitudes, such as human capital theory, individual economic theories, cultural marginality theory, and political affiliation theory all attempt to explain on an individual level why people harbor various attitudes towards migration.

They also found evidence to support collective theories such as contact theory, collective economic theories, and foreign investment theory, depending on the European country in question. Evidence was found on Koh Phi Phi that supported some of these theories, as will be discussed in the *Analysis* section of this Thesis.

In Thailand, Kulkolkarn and Pottipiti (2009:23) trace the public debate on immigration to the 1997 economic crisis “when the unemployment rate rose markedly”. According to a poll by Assumption Business Administration College (ABAC) in Bangkok, ILO and UNIFEM, “about 59 percent” of the Thai people that they surveyed were “opposed to migrant workers in Thailand, believing that they increase unemployment and reduce wages².” Soontayatron (2014) analyzes the perceptions of residents on Koh Samui, Thailand towards Isan migrants from the northeast of Thailand where he finds that some local residents felt “unsafe” due to the increase in migrants on the island (Soontayatron, 2014:7). Social and cultural problems are blamed on the migrants, with offenses ranging from drunken disputes, crime, drugs and prostitution (Soontayatron, 2014). These anti-migrant sentiments have been recorded in other areas of Thailand, and it would be plausible that with the high immigrant population on Koh Phi Phi that these attitudes and perspectives could exist with the local people of the island. If these fears exist, this could be affecting some of the reports related to problems caused by international, low-skilled labor migration to the island. Is international, low-skilled labor migration impacting the economic, social and/or cultural rights of the local people of Koh Phi Phi, or are attitudes and misinformation about migrant workers perpetuating the belief that migration has negative impacts on the local community?

² As reported in Sciortino, R. and S. Punpuing. (2009). *International Migration in Thailand 2009*. Bangkok: IOM Thailand. p. 74.

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS: EVIDENCE FROM THE FIELD

3.1 Setting the Stage: Koh Phi Phi, Krabi Province, Thailand

A total of more than six months was spent conducting research on the impacts of low-skilled labor migration to Koh Phi Phi, Krabi Province, Thailand between July 2015 and January 2016. This time span allowed the researcher to observe the island and the flexible labor market from low- to high-seasons. During the course of that time, the researcher observed the interactions between local Thai residents and foreign residents from all over the world.

Koh Phi Phi is located approximately 42 kilometers from Krabi City and the Ao Nang Sub-district (of which Koh Phi Phi belongs). The distance from the administrative center as well as its distance from Bangkok and other areas that are the focus of migrant worker issues in Thailand seems to help fuel the under-regulation found on the island. Koh Phi Phi is the largest money-generating tourism destination in the province which has led to a lack of government response to the needs and situation of the island, reportedly based on the assumption that the island should be able to sustain itself. Also, it is because of Koh Phi Phi's money-generating ability that under-regulation is allowed to continue as under-regulation is part of the reason why Koh Phi Phi is a 'successful' tourism destination. Currently, there is a push (both by local residents and government departments) to regulate the island in order to preserve the marine national park for the benefit of future generations of island residents. This includes regulating business practices, environmental impacts of tourism and labor issues.

Estimating the total population of the island is rather difficult for two main reasons. Most of the local Thai residents are in fact not local at all. Many are internal migrants, mostly from the mainland province of Krabi and other southern Thai provinces. Many, even after decades of living on the island, still have not changed their household registration as living on the island. Instead, most maintain their

homestead in their home provinces. One key informant stated that in the past the officials of the island kept records of all the families living on the island and where they were from, but had since stopped this practice. According to an official of the Ao Nang Sub-district Administrative Organization (ANSAO), approximately 700 families are listed as living on Koh Phi Phi.

There are an estimated 3,000 local Thai people living on Koh Phi Phi¹. According to local residents, this number represents about 40 percent of the total population living on the island. Another 40 to 50 percent (according to local estimates) is made of migrant workers from Myanmar, but this number is also difficult to define as many of the migrant workers from Myanmar and other Asian countries are irregular migrants who are working without the proper documentation. Many of these migrants live in a makeshift village on the way to Baan Suphanimit (locally known as Baan Tsunami), the created community built after the tsunami destroyed almost all of the structures on the island, leaving many local Thai residents homeless. Local Thai residents stated that no Thai person had ever entered the migrant camp and therefore it is difficult to know exactly how many people live in the camp.

The remainder of the residents are Western locals that either have a business on the island, work legitimately as dive instructors, or work irregularly in many of the dive shops, bars, and tour agencies on the island. For the most part, these Western residents do not interact with other ethnicities on the island beyond the purposes of work and community interests. Many of these residents do not speak the Thai language even after many years of living on the island.

Koh Phi Phi is heavily unregulated in many senses. Although there are police on the island and the immigration department visits the island regularly, there are still many undocumented workers operating leisurely on the island, both from other Asian countries and Western countries. When speaking with an official from the Krabi Immigration Department that requested to remain unnamed, he explained to me that he did not want to arrest and deport people that wished to stay on the island and work. The official indicated that Koh Phi Phi does not have enough local Thai laborers on the island for all the jobs available and that foreign labor is needed. As long as foreign workers obey the other Thai laws and do not become a problem for local Thai

¹ Estimated based on local estimates told to the researcher during the research period.

people, this official does not concern himself with foreign laborers on the island. This under-regulation of foreign labor allows the island to fill its large labor gap and keep prices in the tourism industry low in order to cater to the ‘backpacker’ tourist market of Thailand’s tourism industry.

3.2 Meet the Actors: Local Thai People, Myanmarese Migrant Workers, and Western Foreign Workers

3.2.1 Main Characters: Local Thai Workers and Residents

As the impact of low-skilled labor migration on local Thai residents is the focus of this research, local Thai individuals are the unit of analysis, or the main characters, of this study. Responses to the narrative questionnaire from the Thai participants were mixed. Sixteen Thai participants indicated that they had previously worked or currently work with migrant workers, mainly in occupational categories such as restaurant staff, travel and tour agency staff, dive staff, bar staff, and hotel staff. Two-thirds (14 of 21) of the Thai responses stated through the questionnaire that they were not bothered by the presence of migrant workers on the island, or that the presence of migrant workers on the island had no affect on them. Of the 21 responses received from Thai people, only a relatively small number (five responses) had indicated that they felt that migrant workers were having a negative impact on the island. Three participants highlighted a fear of the growing number of migrant workers. One participant stated that they felt that “in the future, Thai people will not have work if workers from Myanmar keep coming.”

Five themes were drawn from those responses. Those themes include migrants take jobs, migrants do the jobs that locals do not want or cannot do, low wages in the tourism industry on Koh Phi Phi, crime and other social problems caused by migrant workers and the poor attitudes of some migrant workers towards the local people. Five respondents indicated that they believed that migrant workers “take jobs from Thai people” although they did not indicate whether or not they had direct experience of this or how they came to know or understand that statement to be true.

One respondent stated that “there is no business on the island that does not have [migrant workers from] Myanmar.” A few community members indicated that while the migration levels on the island seem satisfactory at the moment, they fear that if migrant workers keep coming, there will be no work left for Thai people. “Soon there will be no work for locals,” stated a long tail boat driver. A local Thai travel agent suggested that “the government should make the law to keep some jobs for local people. If not, soon the Thai people will have no work. Only the Burmese and the *farang* (Thai word for Western nationals).”

While there were a few responses that indicated that participants experienced or perceived negative impacts from international, low-skilled labor migration, others saw the necessity in hiring migrant workers. “Thai people are lazy. They don’t want to do hard work. Burmese do all the work Thai people do not want to do,” stated an owner of a small guesthouse. “If they only take the jobs Thai people do not want, I think they [migrant workers] are ok,” commented a masseuse at one of the many shops on the island. A cook in a small restaurant stated that “migrant workers are good. They come here, they work hard, they send money to Burma. They do the job no one else wants.”

Some people also indicated that the wages on the island were low. Some blamed this as part of the reason why many Thai people did not want to work in some sectors and why some businesses chose to hire migrant workers over local Thai workers. “Thai people want more money to work. Jobs here do not pay. Many people cannot stay working for low salaries,” commented the masseuse. Another respondent, a food stall cook said that people from “Myanmar are happy to work for low salaries here. Still better than Myanmar.”

A few social problems were indicated through the responses to the Thai questionnaire, including an increase in crime, the reoccurrence of previously eradicated health issues, and migrants not understanding Thai language and culture. One mini mart owner stated that migrant workers from Myanmar “steal bags from the tourists on the beach.” He also indicated that it was the migrant workers that “sell drugs in the bars on the beach at night.” A local tattoo artist indicated that “workers from Myanmar have diseases that Thailand does not.” “They [migrant workers] do not know about our culture,” stated one community member who operates a small

souvenir stall, “and when they [migrant workers from Myanmar] are bad to tourists, the tourists think they are Thai people, and think bad about Thai people.” In this way, he felt that the actions of migrant workers from Myanmar reflected badly on Thai society. Another respondent who works at a small minimart stated that she was “scared when they see groups of Burmese walking together at night” although she did not indicate why she felt this way.

Three respondents also indicated that “migrant workers do not respect local people” and “stay separate in their own group.” A server at a small restaurant on the island stated that “they [migrant workers] act like they are king and Thai people are nothing.” Clarification of the issue later through an interview indicated that the participant felt that this attitude was a direct impact of the many shops and businesses around the island that reportedly paid police officers and immigration officials in order to hire migrant workers and Western tourists, although he had no direct knowledge of this to be true or any experience paying officers. “They think they above the law,” he stated in the questionnaire, “and they do not care about local people.”

After the collection and analysis of the narrative questionnaires, key informant and respondent interviews were conducted with local Thai residents of the island. One of the reasons why key informant interviews were so important to this research is the fact that census and migration data for the island is non-existent. One long-term resident and business owner, Lek², explained that in years past, the officials of the island gathered information from internal migrants from other locations in Thailand, but had since stopped collecting that information. Lek also explained that many people do not change their household registrations to Koh Phi Phi, even after many years of residency here. In fact, he himself has lived on the island for more than 20 years and his household registration is still listed as his hometown, which is located in another province in the south of Thailand. “Many people, even Thai people, do not register living here,” Lek explained. “Many people live here for a long time, but still, their house says they living in Songkla or Nakorn [Sri Thammarat].”

Another key informant, Tak, cited more social and cultural impacts related to the presence of migrant workers on the island. Tak, who is unemployed in the

² All names have been changed in order to protect the identities of participants in this study.

traditional sense, informed the researcher that he had once had an issue with migrant workers from Myanmar over-harvesting fish from the sea. He explained,

“Before I have the net in the sea and I would take the fish from the net to eat, to sell, but I only take what I need, and I leave the rest. I see more and more Burma people out in the sea with their nets. They take all the fish. But I very calm, I not say anything. But then one day, they cut my net! I go and find their boss and fighting with him. I tell him he need to take care his workers. When they do something wrong, he do something wrong too. Now, they still take many fish from the sea, but not like before. Now we have no problem.”

All Thai key informants emphasized that while there were migrant workers, both from Myanmar and also a few Western nationalities, before the tsunami, the economic motivations behind the rebuilding process after the tsunami led to the increase in workers from all over the world, but especially those coming from Myanmar. “People needed to eat, businesses needed to open,” Tak confessed, “many Thai people had died, and many move away. The island needed workers.” Even though these participants identified a need for laborers to do the work that is needed to sustain the ever-growing tourism industry on Koh Phi Phi, they were also worried about the steady increase in migrant workers, especially those from Myanmar. “I see one the other day, he drive the long boat. The long boat!” Mon, a long tail boat driver that has been on the island for almost 20 years explained, “Before you never see like that. Myanmar people only in the restaurants and hotels, but now they can do everything. Soon there will be no more work for the local people.”

3.2.1.1 Theme 1: Migrants Take Jobs

Although some³ participants stated in the narrative questionnaire that they feared that migrant workers take jobs from the local Thai people, the researcher did not find sufficient evidence through the individual interviews to support this statement. To the contrary, not only did no participants

³ Numerous interviews were conducted with community members above and beyond those listed in this analysis, therefore it is difficult to give an exact number of community members that expressed this fear.

report having lost jobs to migrant workers or not being able to find jobs due to the presence of migrant workers, the researcher was unable to locate one member of the community that did not have employment and was actively seeking employment on the island and having difficulties securing employment. Near the end of the field research data gathering process, the researcher specifically asked many members of the community if they knew anyone that was unemployed and actively seeking employment, but was unable to successfully find employment. No participant ever came forward fitting that description. Instead, the researcher did find many examples of participants changing occupations because they did not like the work, such as working in a hotel or restaurant, and now those occupations mainly employ migrant labor. It is for this reason that the researcher must state that she feels that the presence of an increased number of migrant workers on Koh Phi Phi (at least those migrant workers coming from Myanmar) has had no effect on local Thai people's ability to find work on the island.

By contrast, Thai workers reported economic impacts when migrants engage in work in the same sector as the local population, such as work in a travel shop or being a tout agent privately securing accommodations for tourists. Most of the migrant workers in these sectors are from Western countries. There is a growing fear that the increasing number of migrant workers (especially Western migrant workers) will lead to more competition for jobs with local Thai people as businesses see the profitability in hiring migrants that can speak foreign languages, and therefore communicate with tourists on the island. This fear may be justified by the presence of migrant workers in traditionally Thai occupations, such as migrants from Myanmar driving long tail boats or Westerners selling accommodations at the pier. Participants stated that the majority of the impacts they felt related to international, low-skilled labor migration were the product of an increased number of Western migrant workers on the island. Unlike most of the migrant workers from Myanmar who perform jobs undesirable to the local Thai population, many Western migrant workers compete with the local Thai tour agents for customers. Since this work is performance-based rather than salary-based, customers taken from local Thai people lead to lower earnings. Although long tail boat driving is not one of the 39 protected occupations as identified by the Royal Decree on Professions Prohibited to Aliens B.E. 2522 (1979), it is

unclear whether working in a tour office or selling accommodation and tours to tourists at the pier constitutes a violation of the act in that guides/tour guides and hawkers of products are listed as protected professions.

In some situations, Westerners worked alongside Thai workers in the office, and in these situations, both Thai and migrant workers had a good working relationship. Other situations, in which the business was fully operated by Thai people, the participants seemed to harbour hostility towards non-citizens working in the same work. “This work should be kept for Thai people only,” stated one Thai travel agent named Nok. Nok indicated that her business had been struggling with more and more foreigners working in other tour and travel agencies on the island, especially workers coming from Western countries. She also indicated that the problem was not so much the migrant workers from Myanmar, although she did mention how upset she was about a few migrants from Myanmar working at a travel agency; more so it was the Western tourists that came to Koh Phi Phi and wanted to stay and work on the island, who were now working in occupations that Nok felt “should be kept for Thai people only,” including selling tours as she does. Nok stated that

“The *farang* tourists see the other *farang* working, selling tickets, and they buy the tickets from them. They don’t trust Thai people. Always think we want to rip them off. Now more *farang* start to work here, business for us is lower than before.”

Another participant, Palm, independently sells accommodation at the pier. He stated that while he had never personally had any negative experiences with the Westerners that work at the pier in his same line of work, he has felt a financial hit due to the amount of Westerners working on the island increasing.

“The *farangs* come off of the boat. They see me and they see another *farang*. They go to the *farang* for sure. They think the Thai people want to rip them off, but they trust the *farang*. I never hear the *farang* trying to discount the room when talking with the *farang*, but when they talk with us, discount, discount, discount. They think we try

to make more money from them and they don't want to talk with us.”

Not only did some participants state that they had never had a problem finding a job on the island, some also indicated that they had found several jobs on the island, all after going back to their home provinces for months at a time. Another participant that works at one of busy beach bars that light up Loh Dalum Bay each night, Boss, told the researcher that he had been working in this particular bar for just over five months, but has been living and working on the island for more than five years. “I never have the problem finding the job,” Boss stated confidently. “Sometimes I don't want to work, or sometimes I want to go home. When I come back, I always find a job. I stay here now five months.” Also, during the course of many months on the island, the researcher noticed the presence of many ‘HELP WANTED’ signs, both in Thai and Myanmar languages. The researcher feels that this is an indication of the ever-growing job market on the island, part of which is responsible for the increased migration to the island via word-of-mouth job opportunity advertising.

Many other interviews were conducted with other participants that had previously worked in occupations now mainly conducted by migrant workers. Not one participant had reported being forced to leave their job, nor had any participant reported trying to obtain similar work in another location but was unable to do so due to the presence of migrant workers. Also, the researcher was able to speak with many participants who had only recently moved to the island and were able to find employment easily, which could be taken as an indication of the ever-growing job market on the island. It appears that many of the jobs on the island are undesirable for local Thai workers and this is leaving an employment gap that migrant workers are ready and willing to take, which leads to the second identified theme of this research.

3.2.1.2 Theme 2: Migrants Do The Jobs That Thai People Do Not Want Or Cannot Do

This theme is complementary to the first theme identified in this study. While some participants indicated through the narrative questionnaire and subsequent interviews that they believed migrants take work from Thai people, other participants saw the need for migrant labor as migrants perform the jobs that local

Thai workers either do not want to do or cannot do. In fact, many Thai participants had complimentary opinions of their migrant co-workers. “They [migrant workers] work hard,” stated one Thai bartender named Golf. “Many Thai people do not want to work in the bar. Loud, walking, moving. Sometimes hard work.” The switching of sectors for some participants seemed to be more based on the undesirability of the work rather than the inability to find employment in that field.

Noi and Fern, two women currently working as masseurs that had previously been employed as housekeepers in a hotel, were consulted. Both told the researcher about the hard work and low salaries that came with being a housekeeper. “The work was hard and the days long,” Noi expressed. After she left their job at the hotel, she worked at a small bookstore. Noi became very bored of this job, even though the salary was better than at the hotel. She recanted the story about the day her back hurt after sitting in the bookstore all afternoon.

“My friend do massage so one day, my back hurt from sitting all day, and she told me to come get massage so I try it. It felt so good. I was smiling. I thought, I want to do this. I want to make people feel better. So I learn to give massage.”

Noi told the researcher that she is happy with her job, and that the money is much better than at her other work. For her, job satisfaction was the motivating factor behind occupation choice. In no way did she blame migrant workers for taking her job, instead insisted that she did not like the work.

Fern blamed the influx of migrants as part of the reason why she left her work at the hotel. “Many Burma people came,” she started, “and I cannot work with them. I cannot tell them what to do or how to do some things. They cannot understand. Then more came. Then they do not listen to Thai people. I have to find new job.” For Fern, although the presence of migrant workers at her former work place was a deciding factor in her decision to switch occupations, this was not due to Fern being forced from her job. She has since been working in a massage shop for over five years and enjoys her job, especially the flexibility in schedule. She also told the researcher that they were making quite a bit more than they had working in the hotel.

An interview with a worker in one of the many small clothing shops on the island also confirmed the researchers suspicions that participants were choosing to leave undesired occupations rather than being forced from those occupations by an increase in migrant workers. “Before I work in a hotel,” said Ah, the clothing shop attendant, “the work was hard. All day on my feet. This is much better. *Sabai* [relaxed].” Although she stated that she had worked with migrant workers from Myanmar in the past when she worked in a hotel as a housekeeper, she insisted that she had not felt any economic effects of the presence of migrant workers in that line of work. When asked specifically if her salary had changed with the reported increase in migrant workers in her hotel, she simply stated, “no”. Ah felt that the salaries in her former line of work were low due to the nature of the work itself rather than on the presence of foreign workers. Ah stated that while the salary from her current job is similar to that of her former job, she confessed that the work is much less strenuous, which she liked. This was the main motivating factor behind Ah leaving her work at the hotel to work at the clothing shop.

Some participants felt that the reason why many businesses relied on migrant workers from Myanmar was because it is very difficult to find Thai people willing to do the work that is required in the tourism industry. Jane, a receptionist at a large hotel on the island, informed the researcher that she had made friends with a few of the migrant workers at her hotel, and through conversations with them found that they were making 12,000 baht per month and given free accommodation, which is more than some local Thai people make at other locations. It is for this reason that the researcher feels that motivations behind the hiring of Thai workers and migrant workers cannot be strictly financial. The researcher felt that the voices of business owners and employers were also needed in order to understand why some businesses chose to hire migrants and other chose to hire Thai workers.

The researcher was able to speak with a human resources officer from one of the large resorts on the island who had been working on the island for just over two years. She indicated that the resort utilizes migrant labor from Myanmar for about 25 percent of their labor force (approximately 50 employees of the 200 employees at the resort) primarily to fill jobs that local Thai people do not want, such as housekeeping and restaurant staff. She commented that one of the biggest

motivating factors behind hiring migrant workers was not so much the ability to pay low salaries (as some of the salaries paid to migrant staff are actually more than salaries paid to Thai staff in other locations) but the inability to find Thai people willing to do the work that migrant workers do at the resort. “Thai people do not like to work long hours, hours that are normal for the tourism industry,” she explained.

Many participants stated that there were many jobs on the island that they personally did not want to do. Many of the occupations filled by migrant workers from Myanmar require hard work and sometimes long hours. “You see the guy with the cart?” asked Jon, a food server in a small restaurant. “He is from Burma. Thai people do not want to push the cart. Too hot. Too much work.” Another participant that had formerly worked in one of the many busy bars on the island named Ploy confessed that she left that job because “it was too loud. Every night partying. Too much.” Another interesting fact that was highlighted by participants is that many of the local Thai people do not want to work in restaurants due to their affinity to Islam and its strict prohibition on pork products. In this respect, there are some jobs that local Thai people are unable to do due to their religious beliefs.

The researcher was able to speak with a Western business owner who shed some light on some of the experiences she had had with Thai employees. She stated that, on one occasion she had to go to the mainland for a few days while the Thai staff worked at the office alone. When she returned from the mainland, she was surprised to find that no tickets were sold over the course of the time that she was gone. When the owner asked the staff why they were unable to sell any tickets, the Thai staff simply stated that “the *farangs* buy the tickets from you because you are a *farang*. They don’t want to buy the tickets from me.” The owner then asked some of the guests staying at the guesthouse why they chose to go elsewhere to purchase the tickets, and the tourist explained to her about how the Thai staff at the guesthouse had been rude to them, did not seem interested in answering any of their questions, and in fact, was not even at the desk to check them in when the tourists arrived to the guesthouse. The owner then decided to fire the Thai staff and search for new staff.

This story was one of many stories that the owner told to the researcher about problems with hiring Thai staff. She also stated that previous Thai

employees would come to work late, or take time off without proper notification, and would be genuinely disinterested in speaking with tourists. She also stated that it was hard to employ local women as most local women are Muslim and wear a *hijab*. The owner felt that this would scare away customers and therefore refused to hire any staff that dressed as such. The owner stated that many Thai Muslim women approached the business seeking employment, but she refused their requests. While other motivations behind not hiring Thai people such as work ethic may be understandable, refusing to hire Thai Muslim women because of their dress is an obvious example of employment discrimination based on religious association that should not be allowed on the island, or anywhere else.

This owner was not the only employer to complain about the work ethic of the local Thai people. One of the owners of a large hotel was also consulted in order to better understand the motivations behind hiring workers. She explained that migrants were needed on the island to fill jobs that Thai people either did not want or could not do. She expressed dissatisfaction with her Thai staff, and made the comment that “when ASEAN opens its doors, there will be no more Thai staff in *my* hotel.” Currently the hotel employs approximately 250 staff, only five of which are not Thai. Although labor mobility in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) will be limited to the free-flow of *skilled* labor (not unskilled labor), this owner’s statement came as a shock to the researcher. The researcher then asked for further clarification as to why she wished for foreign workers over Thai workers. She stated that Thai workers are lazy and do not want to do the work that is required in the industry; Thai people are disrespectful; Thai people rarely stay with the hotel for long periods of time and therefore it is difficult to train them; and Thai people are often not willing to work for the salaries offered.

Other laborers, not only employers, commented that ‘Thai people are lazy.’ In fact, May, a cook in a small restaurant, seemed certain that any negative impacts reported by Thai people, at least in the economic rights domain, were more due to the Thai people’s own failure to work hard and develop skills. May commended the migrant workers that she had worked with in the past, stating that they were always hard-working and never late to work. By contrast, May also stated that many of the Thai people she had worked with had missed days of work, sometimes

showing up to work hours late and with no reason. She also told the researcher about the attitudes of many Thai people she had met in the work environment, especially young Thai people. She stated that during her years of working on the island, she had seen many Thai workers come and go, some only staying at the restaurant for a month before moving on to a different opportunity. May ended the interview by insisting that if Thai people work hard, develop skills and dedicate themselves to their work that Thai people have no problem in the face of increasing international, low-skilled labor migration.

3.2.1.3 Theme 3: Low-Wages On Koh Phi Phi

Although related to the first and second themes in that they could be considered part of the reason why some jobs are undesirable by the local Thai workers, this theme appeared many times over the course of the research that the researcher found it necessary to explore this theme further. While some people blamed migrant workers for ‘taking jobs from Thai people,’ no participant blamed low wages found on the island to the presence of migrant labor or indicated that wages had dropped with the increase of migrant workers to the island. Instead, many participants believed that the low wages on the island were due to the nature of the work in the tourism industry.

Many of the sectors filled with migrant labor are very low-skilled, and therefore, low-paid jobs. Many participants stated that the pay for these jobs is unacceptable. One business owner said, “Thai people do not want to work for 9,000 baht a month. But all you do is clean the room. What you want me to pay you for?” In this respect, the business owner legitimized low salaries with the low qualifications needed to complete the job. Fern, the masseuse, stated that over the course of five years at the hotel, her salary only rose a little each year, and that there were no bonuses at the end of the year as some other businesses had paid. She identified the low salary (as well as the difficulties in working with migrant workers) as a motivating factor behind switching occupations.

The researcher did find evidence of participants that were working hard, often above and beyond their job titles, yet only earning modest salaries that did not reflect the skill that the participant possessed and that their job required. Ann, whose job title was ‘receptionist,’ was also a food and beverage server and

sometimes a cook in the small restaurant beneath the guesthouse. Ann was also responsible for the end-of-day accounting. Often the owner of the guesthouse would leave the island for work on the mainland, and would leave all responsibilities for the guesthouse and restaurant to Ann, making her less of a receptionist and more of an assistant manager.

Ann told the researcher that when she first arrived to the island, she was asked to work at the front desk from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and was paid 9,000 baht per month and given free accommodation. Four years later, Ann has been asked to work some nights until 12 a.m. helping in the restaurant and doing the accounting, and her salary has only risen 1,000 baht per month to 10,000 baht. The researcher also observed that Ann speaks a remarkably high level of English and is an incredibly motivated and hard worker. Ann indicated to the researcher that she wished to seek different employment because of the low salary and continuously added working responsibilities and hours, which were causing her to lose sleep and be overly stressed. After observing the amount of work she conducted over the course of one day, the researcher started to understand why some Thai people did not want to stay in these types of occupations for that rate of pay.

One owner of a small guesthouse also highlighted the fact that many businesses rely on migrant labor not only due to the shortage of local Thai workers, but also because of the constant driving down of prices caused by tourists that are unwilling to pay for services. He mentioned the fact that tourists do not realize that by driving down prices, they are also driving down the funds available to pay salaries. He confided in the researcher that sometimes, if the owner or his staff are not willing to lower the prices, tourist will go to another establishment, which also hurts business. This individual, as well as other owners on the island, stated that they feel pressured to cater to cheap tourists in order to keep their business going, and this affects their ability to pay decent wages. Migrant workers coming from Myanmar are willing to do the work for the wages this owner is able to pay, and this is one of the reasons why he chose to hire migrant workers in the past.

The researcher also asked questions concerning participants' living arrangements and expenditures in order to assess the ability of wages to sustain individuals on the island. The cheapest accommodations on the island, as reported by

one participant who lived at the establishment, was 5,000 baht per month, unfurnished and with a bathroom shared amongst the renters of three other rooms. Also the cost of basic utilities is higher on Koh Phi Phi than in other parts of Thailand. Although the laying of underwater cables to carry electricity from the mainland to Koh Phi Phi has normalized the electricity rate with that of the mainland, water is still about 80 times as expensive on Koh Phi Phi as it is on the mainland (one unit of water in Krabi town is three baht whereas one unit of water on Koh Phi Phi is 250 baht). The price of food on the island, even at simple street stalls, is about double that of the mainland. A minimum wage salary of 300 baht per day or 9,000 baht per month does not go very far after paying for basic necessities.

Many workers also had the choice of free accommodation at their place of employment or a living allowance added to their salaries. Some participants reported accepting the accommodation allowance while finding cheap accommodation with their friends in order to save money. Although the highest salary reported by participants was about 18,000 baht per month, many other participants, whose earnings were based on tasks rather than a salary, reportedly were able to earn between 15,000 and 40,000 baht a month depending on tourist seasons and tourist flows. Although the researcher found evidence of low wages in the tourism industry on Koh Phi Phi, the researcher also found evidence that if people are willing to work hard and increase their skills, much higher salaries can be found on Koh Phi Phi.

3.2.1.4 Theme 4: Migrant-Related Crime/Social Problems

When asked about other possible social and cultural impacts of international, low-skilled labor migration to the island, many participants admitted that while they had never personally had a negative experience with any migrant workers from Myanmar, they were still afraid of them. “Many people tell me about bad things that the Burma people do,” shared Ploy, a food server at a restaurant on the island. “I see them walking in groups at night. They are scary.” Mai, a woman that works in a mini-mart also indicated a fear of migrant workers coming from Myanmar. “Many of them live in the mountain and pass by here on their way home at night. Big groups. I don’t like to go out at night alone,” she stated, although she did not mention any direct experience than led her to this fear.

Although many participants did report having heard of many crimes committed by migrant workers, especially those coming from Myanmar, some also expressed scepticism towards many of the reports. Many acknowledged that they themselves had never had a negative experience with migrant workers nor had acquaintances that had ever had a bad experience with a migrant worker, and therefore had a hard time believing all of the stories that they had heard about such incidents. Boss, the worker at the beach bar, stated that it was not only migrants from Myanmar that were selling drugs and stealing bags, though he did not divulge how he knew this information to be true. “Not only Burmese that do the bad thing on the island. Thai people too. And *farang*,” Boss explained. He also stated that the migrant workers from Myanmar cannot do anything that Thai people do not allow them to do, implying that even if migrant workers from Myanmar are engaged in crime on the island, there are other local Thai people who were controlling their actions. Boss also stated that he had never directly experienced any negative impacts of international, low-skilled labor migration and urged the researcher not to believe everything that was told to her about the problems caused by migrant workers.

Although there were many reports about crimes committed by migrant workers on the island, there were very few cases that were actually witnessed or experienced by the participant reporting the crime. The stealing of bags from tourists on the beach, the selling of drugs in the beach bars, and other crimes were attributed to migrants on the island, but no participants were able to confirm how they knew these crimes were committed by migrant workers. It is for this reason that the researcher sought the experience of the local police department in order to verify such reported crimes.

According to the Koh Phi Phi Tourist Police, although migrants are blamed for many of the crimes on the island, the majority of crimes and social problems on the island are actually committed by local Thai people. The officers estimated that approximately 80 percent of the crimes reported on the island are actually committed by local Thai people, while the remaining 20 percent are a mix of culprits including migrant workers, Western workers, and Western tourists. Common crimes such as the theft of bags on the beach are blamed on migrant workers from Myanmar by many of the local Thai residents, however, the Koh Phi Phi Police

Department stated that most of the time when bags are taken from the beach from tourists, it is by other tourists, not island residents. After talking to island residents, the researcher did not find any resident that had ever been victim of a crime committed by a migrant worker.

The researcher was able to speak with a local man named Man that was currently unemployed on the island, although this was by choice rather than by economic displacement caused by the presence of migrant workers. In fact, Man verified this by stating that he did not want to work all day, every day for little money and preferred to live a simply life. Along with the second Thai key informant, Tak, Man owns kayaks that they rent to tourists by the hour. This allows for an income that is able to sustain their modest lifestyle.

Man did have a lot to say about what he perceived as the social and cultural impacts of international, low-skilled labor migration, especially of migrants coming from Myanmar. He explained that often, migrant workers from Myanmar would take over the *tak-raw* playing field near his home and play all day, and had no concern about the local Thai people that also wished to play on the same field. Similar to the story of the fishing net, Man stated that he felt as though migrant workers had no concern over local people at all, and did not interact with them very much. He also commented that migrant workers tend to throw their garbage everywhere, and have no concern over the environment on the island, of which Man and his friends collect garbage from the beach every morning. “This is my home,” Man began, “but for the Burma [people] this is a place to work and send money back to *their* home.” He feels that some migrant workers have no regard for the sustainability of the island, instead seeing the island as a place in which to earn as much as possible before going home. Man concluded that if migrant workers wish to come to Koh Phi Phi to live and work that they should treat it the same as they would their home, and take care of the island and the people. The current concerns over the attitudes of migrants towards the local Thai people highlighted in this example bring us to the final theme of this study.

3.2.1.5 Theme 5: Attitudes of Migrants Towards Local Thai People

Some participants did confess that they felt that migrant workers from Myanmar do not respect Thai people. One long tail boat driver named Ball explained that

“One time, we [long tail boat drivers] all stand on the pier. The Burmese come with their cart to pick up stuff from the boat. They sit on the pier. No one can go anywhere. They block the way for the customers coming off the boat. Many of us, we try to tell them to move. Get out of the way. But they not listen. I think, fighting for sure so I run and get my *farang* friend to help. He come and tell the Burmese to move and they listen to the *farang*. They not listen to the Thai but they listen to the *farang*.”

Poor attitudes of migrants, both from other Asian countries and from Western countries, were reported by some Thai participants in this study. Although many people stated that they never had a direct negative experience with migrant workers, others, especially those that work during the evenings and nights, stated that they felt that migrants were disrespectful to local people. One Thai woman, Fon, stated that while she was walking home one night, one of the Western migrants that worked in a bar was very drunk, and harassed her as she walked passed the bar at which the migrant was working. This Western migrant, a male, grabbed the woman’s arm and tried to dance with her, and she was offended. “Can you just touch people in your own country?!?” she commented. This is just one of many examples of incidents told to the researcher, mostly in casual conversation, of problems with migrants and tourists from the West. Interestingly, no similar incidents were reported concerning migrants from Myanmar.

3.2.2 Supporting Roles: Migrant Workers From Myanmar

During the course of the research, it was made apparent to the researcher that migrant workers from Myanmar play a supporting role on the island, mainly working in occupations that support the tourism economy and occupations that local Thai residents do not want or cannot do. Key informant interviews were conducted

with participants from Myanmar in order to better understand their migrant experiences, their motivations behind coming to Koh Phi Phi and how they obtained employment upon arrival. Lin, a travel and tour agent with impressive English skills expressed that, while he liked working on the island, it was often difficult to work with local Thai people because of the language barrier. He said that many Thai people do not speak English, and since he does not speak Thai, communication is difficult.

“At first just a little bit, because I don’t speak Thai. So for me, every time I had to speak English here, and not many Thai people speak English and cannot understand, so when I speak with them, I have to speak very slowly.”

Lin’s main motivations for coming to work on Koh Phi Phi centered around two issues; the ability to earn higher wages on the island than in Myanmar and the comfortable atmosphere of the island. He went on to clarify that

“[Myanmar workers] think very good here, because in my country, they get maybe one day, 300 kyat or like 100 baht so the money was very different. Like 100 baht is nothing in Thailand, in my country they get many thing, but like very small. But in Thailand, they get like 400 baht in one day. Or maybe 350. Like maybe 150 or 250 they can send money to Burma.”

Also, the relaxed atmosphere of the island contributes to his desire to stay and work on Koh Phi Phi. He stated that

“If Burmese people have money, they can do whatever here. Here, you can only get around by foot. It’s a small island, so you don’t need a motorbike or motor car here. There are no accidents. Everyone the same here. Thai, Burmese people or tourists, everyone have to walk here. It is much better.”

The researcher asked Lin why he thought so many people from Myanmar chose to come to Koh Phi Phi to work. He cited two main reasons he felt that many migrants from Myanmar sought work in Thailand and on Koh Phi Phi; disappointment

and insecurity in the government in Myanmar and the abundance of work on the island due to local Thai people not wanting to do hard work. Lin commented that

“Burmese people come to Thailand because of the Burmese government, that is why they come to Thailand. Most of the Burmese people, they are very hardworking here in Thailand. Most of the Thai people, you know, they not like very much the hard work. Any bad job on the island, look, everyone is from Burma.”

Methods of obtaining employment were different for the participants coming from Myanmar. Lin found employment on his own by asking various businesses if they had any work. The second and third participants both found work through social network connections, including friends from Myanmar who are currently working on the island. The first and second participants also indicated that there were employment brokers for Myanmar people on the island that assisted new and long-term migrants find employment on the island, but neither of them had utilized this method to find employment. These interviews helped the researcher to better understand motivations for migrant workers to come and find employment on the island, working conditions of migrant workers on the island, as well as methods of obtaining work for migrant workers on the island that come from Myanmar.

3.2.3 Antagonists: Western Workers

Finally, interviews were also sought with Western migrant workers in order to understand their migrant situation, how they sought employment and their motivations behind living and working on Koh Phi Phi. Western workers tend to have premium occupations such as tour agents and dive instructors. In this way, they occupy jobs that Thai people would like to have, and thus represent competition for some Thai laborers, making them the antagonist in this study. An interview was conducted with Matt, a Western dive instructor on the island. He gave a thorough explanation of all of the training required to receive a dive instructor license. The length of time and training required to do this work forced the researcher to re-evaluate the term “low-skilled labor” and whether or not diving qualifies as such.

Matt was also asked questions about his visa status. Currently he is on a triple-entry tourist visa. He explained that his original visa was for 60 days, which he extended another 30 days at the Krabi Immigration Office. After the initial 90 days, he had to leave the country briefly and returned with a new 60 day visa per his initial triple-entry visa. After the 60 days, a traveller is not able to extend the visa and must exit the country again, returning with another 60 day visa, which is able to be extended for another 30 days. This allows for the possibility of staying in the Kingdom for 240 days or about eight months. While working on this visa is technically illegal, this is the process that many divers on the island complete in order to be able to stay and work in the country due to a limited amount of work permits granted.

Westerners are also employed at the many bars on the island whose primary responsibility is to “get people in and keep them partying.” One of these “professional partiers”, Sam, is required to work from 6 p.m. until 2 a.m. and earns 400 baht per day, along with free drinks and food at the restaurant. As he explained, “the money pays for my room so I can stay here, and I don’t have to pay to party, which is the reason why I am staying on [Koh] Phi Phi.” Sam explained that he was backpacking through Southeast Asia and loved Koh Phi Phi and wished to stay on the island for a while. Having this job allows him to stay on the island, party every night, and not spend his travel funds.

Sam stated that he rarely had any interactions with local Thai people, other than the bartender at the bar. Most of the staff at the bar, according to Sam, were from Myanmar. Sam commented that the Myanmar staff spoke much better English than the Thai bartender, which is one of the reasons why he had very few interactions with the local Thai people. He also said that he felt that local Thai people were “uptight” and “rude”. Sam mentioned that on a few occasions he saw local people walking home and tried to “engage them” but they seemed to want to have nothing to do with him. This working tourist was also on a similar visa to that of the Western dive instructor, making him an irregular migrant worker as well. He told the researcher that his intentions are to only stay on Koh Phi Phi for a few months before finding “a new spot to chill”.

Unlike the first two Western participants, the third interviewee has been on the island continuously for just over two years working at a small travel and tour shop

on the island. Maria originally came on holiday and fell in love with the island and searched for a way to stay on the island and earn enough money to live. She had met new local Thai friends during her initial visit to the island and those friends helped her secure work at the shop.

Maria makes 10,000 baht per month plus commission on all sales similar to Thai travel agents. Depending on the company, she can make anywhere from 10 to 35 percent of the amount of the tickets or accommodation. She stated that in high season, it was normal to make more than 40,000 baht a month. While she confessed that she would be able to earn a lot more money if she chose to work in her home country, she liked the lifestyle and environment of the island much better. She told the researcher that she was “happier here than at home. It’s not always about the money.”

Unlike most other migrant workers, Maria spoke a fair amount of Thai and was able to communicate with the tour companies in Thai. She also stated that she had made many friends on the island that were local Thai people. “Thai people here are really great,” Maria remarked, “they are really friendly and have opened up their homes to me. I really like it here.” The researcher asked Maria about what she had observed concerning international, low-skilled labor migration, both of workers from Myanmar and other Western nationals. She stated that she has never had any direct contact or experiences with migrant workers from Myanmar because the office did not employ any migrants except for her. Concerning migrants from Western countries, Maria also said that she only interacted with a few on a regular basis as she has had bad experiences before. “Most only come to party. They drink all night. Get drunk. And they run around like they own this island. I choose not to hang out with those kinds of people,” stated the participant. Maria also said that many of her Thai friends complain about migrant workers, both those coming from Myanmar and other Western nationals. “They talk about the bad things that the Burmese do, but I really don’t know about that. But the *farangs*, I see what they are talking about. They treat Thai people like dirt.” She went on to clarify that not all Westerners that were working on the island were like that, but explained that many of the Western migrants that were working in the bars seemed to have that attitude.

3.3 Expert Interviews: The Critics

Expert opinions were collected from officials from the Krabi Immigration Department as well as the Koh Phi Phi Tourist Police Department and the president of the Phi Phi Island Tourist Business Association in order to shed light on possible economic, social and cultural impacts of international, low-skilled labor migration to the island. These interviews were reserved for the end of the field data gathering period in order to minimize any bias the data could have on the researcher in obtaining data from the laborers of the community.

The Koh Phi Phi Tourist Police Department was consulted in order to assist the researcher in understanding crimes reportedly committed by migrant workers in the community and better assess possible social and cultural impacts of international, low-skilled labor migration to the island. The researcher asked about specific incidents that had been reported to her by community members, and while the officers acknowledged that some of the reported incidents had occurred, they stated that they were not representative of the full range of crimes committed on the island.

These officers also highlighted other social issues that affect the local Thai community, such as the use of *nam tom*. This is a drink that is made by combining the *tom* leaf with Coke-a-Cola and cough medicine, and can create stimulant effects that can be highly addictive. The imbibing of this concoction could be posing a greater impact of local Thai people's (men's especially) ability to find work on the island than the presence of migrant workers from other countries. Although the police listed this as a social problem amongst Thai men, many employers also listed this as a problem when hiring Thai men. During the course of field work, the researcher spoke with an owner of a boat trip company that fired all but a few staff in his business due to the staff's use of drugs and alcohol that was affecting their ability to do their work. The staff's use of drugs and alcohol was so bad that the owner made the decision to fire the staff before securing new staff and is currently operating his own boat until new staff is found. Although this owner stated that he would never hire migrant staff as staff on the boat need to have a good working relationship and communication in order to operate smoothly, he also commented that "Burmese are smart, they drink beer; Thai people are stupid, they drink *nam tom*."

The researcher had the opportunity to speak with the president of the Phi Phi Island Tourist Business Association and sought his expertise as to why businesses relied so heavily on migrant workers, as well as other impacts on the community caused by the presence of migrant workers. As a business owner and a former salaried worker himself, and having been on the island for more than 30 years, he provided much useful information regarding migrant trends on the island. The president stated that he hired migrant staff from Myanmar not because of the cheapness of the labor, but for the quality of their work. This business owner, who does also employ Thai staff, also stated that it was difficult to find enough reliable local people to fill job vacancies on the island. In a business respect, migrants are needed on Koh Phi Phi to fill the many employment vacancies due to a lack of reliable local laborers.

Many other interviews were conducted with members of the community over the course of the research period however, not all interviews are included in this account. The researcher feels that the interviews highlighted in this thesis represent the full range of perspectives found in the community, therefore a saturation level has been met at which no new data can be obtained. The researcher actively sought examples of economic, social and cultural rights violations committed by migrant workers, but other than repeated stories, the researcher was unable to find any participant other than those already discussed who was able to give a direct account of such violations.

3.4 Focus Group Sessions – Bringing It All Together

After completing the semi-structured interviews with members of the community, three focus groups were formed in order to help clarify some of the issues surrounding international, low-skilled labor migration to Koh Phi Phi. Those groups included an owners/employers group, a Thai laborer/resident group and a migrant (Myanmarese) laborer/resident group.

All participants in the owners group were owners of small- to medium-size enterprises. Speaking with this group helped the researcher to understand that there is not one unified voice of the community concerning the benefits or impacts of international, low-skilled labor migration on the island, rather there is disagreement

among community members on this subject. While some owners had positive things to say about the benefits of such immigration, others felt that the presence of too many migrant workers is having an impact on the community. Some participants stated that migrant workers were essential to the island for many reasons, including a shortage of available labor on the island, the salary demands of local Thai people, the local population's inability to speak English and therefore their inability of working in the tourism industry and Thai people's work ethic. All owners that employed migrant workers stated that they paid their workers the Thai minimum wage and sometimes more. "If they work good, I pay good. I want good workers," commented one bar owner.

This group of owners and employers told the researcher many stories detailing the work ethic of former employees, both Thai and migrant. One owner of a small guesthouse, although he currently employs migrant workers, questioned the effectiveness and efficiency of hiring migrant workers that "do not understand when you tell them to do something." Many of the migrant workers in these low-skilled positions do not speak Thai or English, and this makes communication difficult. Other participants admitted that this is sometimes a problem however they also acknowledged that some long-term migrant workers have begun to speak better Thai. At the beginning of the field data collection period, this particular owner had a 'HELP WANTED' sign in front, written in Myanmarese. Although still short on staff, by the end of the researcher's time on the island, the business had a new 'HELP WANTED' sign, this one in Thai, possibly pointing to this owners change in employee preference.

The Thai laborer/resident group consisted of five members of the community working in different labor sectors and one unemployed participant, all of which participated in the individual semi-structured interviews. One of the biggest concerns of all the participants was the difficulty in communicating with migrant workers as many do not speak Thai. This is the same for workers coming from Myanmar and elsewhere, such as Western countries. Some participants stated that they still did not have much to say about international, low-skilled labor migration as their current employment does not have migrant workers in their sector (massage and tattoo industries), and that some participants rarely interact with migrant workers. Those that did interact with migrant workers had mostly pleasant things to say about their migrant

co-workers in that they are hard working. Other than the incident of migrant workers from Myanmar over harvesting fish from the ocean as told by Tak, no participants had any direct negative experience with migrant workers. All did indicate that they felt a lack of respect from migrant workers, especially those workers coming from Western countries and working at the various bars on the island. “This is our country. Our home. And they come to work. They should respect us and our home,” Nok commented.

The purpose of the focus group with migrant workers was to highlight not only motivations and methods of obtaining employment on the island, but also about relationships with local Thai people. All participants in the migrant laborer/resident group had connections on the island prior to coming to the island. Most had family members already working on the island, while others had come after friends had told them of job opportunities on the island. Two participants lived in what is known as the “Burmese village” while others lived in housing provided by their employers. The participants’ motivations for coming to and staying on Koh Phi Phi were good salaries, especially compared to their home countries, good working conditions: most reported good working relationships with their bosses and co-workers, and good living conditions: some were offered free accommodation at their place of work while others commented on the relaxed environment of the island.

Most confessed that they did not have much interaction with local Thai people outside of the work environment. No participant had experienced any negative incidents with Thai people, except for one. Lin, the travel agent that participated as a Myanmar key informant, told the researcher that a Thai man had stolen a pair of shoes from in front of the guesthouse/travel agency that he worked. The shoes belonged to a tourist that was staying at the guesthouse, and the tourist was so eager to get the shoes back that they called the police wishing to file a report. Lin reported that he walked with the tourist to the police station, but before they arrived, they found a Thai man wear the missing shoes. Lin confronted the man, speaking English as he does not speak Thai. He stated that the man with the shoes started to tell him something in Thai before taking off the shoes and throwing them at Lin, running as he threw them. The police came but the man was already gone and the tourist already had their shoes back so nothing was done.

The researcher sensed a lack of desire to interact with the local Thai people on the behalf of the migrant workers from Myanmar. When discussing plans for the future, all of the participants expressed a desire to go back to their home country “when things are better”. Many are interested in opening up business opportunities employing the skills that they have gained working in the tourist industry on Koh Phi Phi.

CHAPTER IV

INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL/THEMATIC ANALYSIS: CONNECTING THE STORIES WITH THE THEORIES

Now that the setting has been identified and the actors are clear, it is time to analyze the drama unfolding on Koh Phi Phi concerning international, low-skilled immigration to the island. Phenomenological analysis requires the researcher to take the participants' or actors' experiences and perceptions of a phenomenon (first-order constructs) as found through qualitative research methods and connect those experiences and perceptions to the theories found in the literature (second-order constructs). This chapter will answer the research questions posed in Chapter One as well as analyze the situation of international, low-skilled labor on the island by connecting the literature found in Chapter Two with the data gathered from participants as illustrated in Chapter Three.

4.1 How do local workers and host communities experience the effects of international, low-skilled labor migration?

The labor market of Koh Phi Phi is very segmented and different ethnicities work in different sectors. This is one of the reasons why there are not many impacts felt from international, low-skilled labor migration to the island. Thai workers are represented in every sector on the island, while migrant workers from other Asian countries tend to occupy low-skilled jobs that require interaction with tourists, such as hotel and restaurant staff and souvenir sellers. The colonial history of many Asian countries has led to a greater English speaking ability for those migrants, and the lower salary demands make them good employee choices for many occupations on the island. Western migrants, on the other hand, tend to occupy premium jobs that, with

the exception of dive instructors, requires little education and experience beyond the ability to speak with the tourists. These migrants tend to occupy sectors such as tour sales, dive staff and bar staff.

All interactions between local Thai residents and foreign workers that the researcher observed were amicable. No evidence was witnessed of social discrimination, both on the part of local Thai residents and foreign workers. This includes both interactions inside and outside of the work place. That being said, there were not many interactions witnessed between local Thai residents and foreign workers outside of the work environment, with a few exceptions. Local workers seem to segregate into social groups consisting of local Thai workers, Western workers and other migrant workers from ASEAN countries in their own ethnic groups. Most local Thai residents do not have more than basic English speaking abilities and most foreigners, both Western and other nationalities, do not speak Thai, including long-term foreign residents. This makes interactions between the groups difficult and social segregation seem almost natural. Because of this social segregation, local Thai workers and the host community of Koh Phi Phi experience international, low-skilled labor migration mainly in the form of co-workers. Many participants stated that they had experiences working with foreign laborers. Although many local Thai people have worked in the same place as migrant workers from Myanmar, they seldom have the same jobs as the local Thai population.

Similar to Foged and Peri's 2014 study, the findings of this study indicated that, in the context of labor employment in the tourism industry of Koh Phi Phi, migrant workers did not "crowd out" local Thai people from the labor market. Foged and Peri utilize the economic canonical model of immigration that states that as the supply of labor increases, the demands for labor decrease which can lead to downward pressure on wages for local people (2014). The researcher feels that this cannot be applied to the context of Koh Phi Phi as the labor market is very dynamic and ever-expanding. More and more hotels and other tourism-related businesses are springing up all over the island, which leads to more jobs. It is because this labor market is continually growing that the researcher feels that the canonical model is not valid in this context.

The researcher did not find evidence of upward employment mobility as simply highlighted by Foged and Peri (2014). While there were many instances of local Thai laborers changing occupations, it is unclear as to whether this switch was a direct result of labor migration or due to the nature of the work in the tourism industry. The switching of labor sectors could be considered an adaptive strategy to the low wages found in many sectors on the island, however, it cannot be definitively linked to international, low-skilled labor migration. The researcher found no evidence of managerial positions created for the sole purpose of managing international labor migrants, rather those local Thai people that did occupy managerial positions gained those positions through experience in the industry. Also, educated Thai workers were brought to the island to fill some managerial positions, indicating that it is not simply the increase in migrant numbers that push local workers into managerial positions, but it is also based on education and experience in the field.

The researcher found little evidence of negative economic impacts of international, low-skilled labor migration on the local Thai workers and residents of Koh Phi Phi other than the impacts caused when migrant laborers engage in the same occupations as the local Thai people. This was very interesting as it was the rumored effects of this labor migration on the local people that sparked interest into this research. There were reports of people losing jobs and wages dropping due to the increasing presence of migrant workers, however the researcher did not find evidence to substantiate these claims. No participant reported experiencing their wages decrease and the researcher was unable to locate any participant that was out of work and currently seeking employment, but was unable to secure employment due to the large number of migrant workers on the island. These two pieces of evidence led the researcher to the conclusion that the presence of migrant workers does not have significantly adverse economic impacts on local Thai residents, again, with the exception of those local Thai residents that are employed in similar occupations as migrant workers.

Much of the findings echoed Pongponrat's (2015) and Soontayatron's (2014) studies in that job creation power of the tourism industry (in Pongponrat's and Soontayatron's contexts, Koh Samui, and in this study Koh Phi Phi) led to an employment gap, which led to increased migration as foreign laborers came to fill job

vacancies. Although Pongponrat finds that labor migration may disrupt the local community as migrants bring with them their cultures and lifestyles, the researcher did not find evidence of such negative effects on the local community of Koh Phi Phi, at least in regards to migrant workers from Myanmar. Rather most migrant workers from Myanmar stick to their own ethnic groups, therefore causing little disturbance with the social or cultural lives of local Thai people. Immigration to Koh Phi Phi, for the most part, has not inhibited the local Thai people from engaging in their normal social lives. The exception to this would be environmental degradation caused by some Myanmar migrant workers who reportedly dispose of waste inappropriately and over harvest fish from the sea. Some participants in this study stated that this did affect them in negative ways, and as such, this should also be highlighted in this report.

Western nationals on the island seem to have a larger impact on the social lives of local Thai people, including partying in the streets that makes it difficult to go home, partying loudly and disturbing other business and people on the island, and some participants have reported a snobbish attitude of Westerners towards local Thai people, though it is difficult to differentiate between Western tourist and Western workers. The fact that some local Thai residents are having to reroute their path home in order to avoid these impacts could be considered evidence the disruption of local Thai people's daily life.

4.2 In what ways are the economic, social and cultural rights of local workers and host communities being affected by this immigration?

As stated above, the researcher did not find that immigration to the island for the purposes of labor had any major impact on local Thai workers' abilities to find jobs on the island. This statement can only be said to be true in the context of the ever-expanding tourism industry on Koh Phi Phi of which jobs seem to be at an endless supply. The impact of international, low-skilled labor migration on the economic rights of local workers and host communities therefore must be understood in context as other labor market situations in other areas may not reflect this ever-abundant labor market.

Currently, the labor migration situation on Koh Phi Phi reflects the Piore's segmented labor market theory (as highlighted by Winter-Ebmer and Zweimuller, 1998) in that incoming migrant workers from Myanmar are working in jobs that local Thai people either do not want (undesirable jobs) or cannot do (due to a lack of skills, such as English speaking skills). These jobs include hotel occupations such as housekeeping, laundry service and bellboy, as well as restaurant occupations such as cooks, servers and dishwashers. Sectors in which the researcher found small impacts to the local Thai people's earnings due to immigration were those sectors in which migrant workers conduct the same work as the local Thai people, such as selling tickets and accommodation, either in travel agencies or independently at the pier. Very few migrants from Myanmar engage in this work; most of the foreign workers in this sector are from Western countries who are able to speak the language of the tourists. There is a fear that migrants will soon occupy all sectors on the island, and if this happens, the researcher believes that the increased competition between migrants and local Thai laborers could lead to potential economic impacts not presently felt.

Although there is no international legal standard to suggest that States should safeguard jobs for their local citizens, there are many international agreements that stress working conditions and remunerations for work. As long as these standards are maintained in the face of increasing immigration, labor migration cannot be said to have a significant impact on the economic rights of the local citizens.

Workers rights in the UDHR are located under Articles 23 and 24. These articles state that everyone has the right to work, to choice of employment and remunerations for their work. The researcher found no evidence of local people who were willing to work that were being denied the right to work. As was made evident through numerous recanting of work histories on the island, local Thai people also have the ability to choose their employment. Concerning remunerations for work, the researcher found no evidence of depressed wages, although the argument could be made that the wage standard for the rest of the country should not be applied to Koh Phi Phi due to its high living costs. No participant reported salaries going down as the numbers of migrants increased. This leads the researcher to say that, according to the worker's rights in the UDHR, international, low-skilled labor migration to Koh Phi Phi does not have any negative effect on such rights.

The ICESCR lists workers' rights in Articles 6 through 8. They state that, not only should people be free from forced labor and servitude, but that the State should step in to help develop the labor skills of its people in order that they may secure better jobs. Regarding technical and vocational training provided by the State, members of the government came to Koh Phi Phi in October 2015 with staff to train massage personnel in the art of massage. This training was free and open to the public. Unfortunately, the researcher was told about this training session by Fern after she had already completed the training. Fern attended the training in order to build her skills as a masseuse. Other such trainings have also been held on the island, and could be indicative of Thailand fulfilling part of its duty to help train its citizens in order to provide more economically stable futures.

Articles 7 and 8 also state that fair wages without discrimination that allow for a decent standard of living for workers and their families is a necessity. Also, workers should be given appropriate rest and leisure time. While the researcher found no wages that were below the national minimum wage as decided by the Department of Employment under the Ministry of Labor in Thailand, whether or not these wages are in sync with the cost of living on the island is debatable. The researcher did find evidence of some local residents (both Thai and migrant workers) being denied the appropriate rest and leisure time (as well as the appropriate compensation for the denied time) in their occupations. As highlighted by the RHRT, this seems to be a feature of work in the tourism industry rather than the presence of migrant workers on the island causing these violations as it affects both local Thai laborers and migrant workers without discrimination.

The researcher found no violations of the social rights listed in the ICESCR that were directly caused by international, low-skilled labor migration to the island. Such rights include; 1) family rights (Article 10); 2) freedom from poverty and adequate standard of living (Article 11); 3) health rights (Article 12); and 4) education rights (Article 13). While it could be argued that, due to the high cost of living on the island, the basic minimum wage in Thailand of 300 baht per day does not constitute an 'adequate standard of living', the researcher found no evidence that this was a direct impact of international, low-skilled labor migration to the island. As stated above, the researcher also did not find any participant, Thai or migrant, that was paid only the

basic minimum wage. Also, the researcher did not find any evidence of previously eradicated illnesses that have been absolutely linked to incoming international migrant workers, and thus cannot definitively state that international, low-skilled labor migration has had any effect on the health rights of the local Thai people on the island.

The researcher found no evidence to suggest that international, low-skilled labor migration from Myanmar had any adverse affects on the cultural rights of the local Thai people. Local Thai people are still able to participate in their religion and cultural events. Evidence was gathered, however, that some Western migrant workers had violated the cultural traditions of some local Thai people by touching them inappropriately, without permission, in violation of the local Thai cultural values. Concerning migrant workers from Myanmar, most isolate themselves from the Thai community except in the work environment. In this way, not only do they not interact, but they also do not interfere with the Thai culture.

Similar to the findings of Soontayatron and Pongponrat, the researcher did find evidence of a fear of migrant workers, especially those coming from Myanmar, that spans genders, occupations and classes of Thai people on the island. Many people fear that migrants from Myanmar are criminals that would hurt them if they saw the benefit and had the chance. Some participants accused migrant workers from Myanmar of many of the crimes committed on the island, including the theft of belongings on the beach and the selling of drugs in the beach bars. Some local residents are also concerned that the bad behavior of migrants from Myanmar does and will reflect poorly on the Thai people as most Western tourists do not know the difference between Thai people and Myanmar people. These feelings seemed to be perpetuated by stories of negative experiences with migrant workers rather than on actual negative impacts experienced by the participants.

While the fear is very real for some participants, the researcher did not find evidence to support this fear. All of the participants that reported a fear of migrants from Myanmar also reported never having had a direct negative experience with migrant workers. Contrary to this finding, the one participant from Myanmar that stated that local Thai people also commit crimes on the island was able to give an account of an incident in which they were directly involved with a crime committed by a local Thai person. While this is not indicative that Thai people commit crimes and

migrants do not, it is hard to justify the fear of local Thai people for migrants from Myanmar, especially if they have not experienced any negative impacts to create that fear.

The police officers on the island did admit to remembering incidents such as going into the room of two Myanmarese migrant workers and finding 40 or more passports, wallets, credit cards, stolen bags, and other stolen items (this incident happened a few years ago), as well as responding and apprehending a migrant worker who inappropriately touched a pre-adolescent local Thai girl (this incident happened the night before the interview), but they stated that these memorable incidents were little in comparison with incidents committed by Thai people. They stated that Thai people were also responsible for stealing bags from the beach and selling drugs in the bars, although they told me that the majority of people that steal bags from the tourists on the beach are in fact, other tourists, and not local people, Thai or migrant.

In this sense, while migrant workers from Myanmar are often the scapegoat for such social ills (Hall 2011), they are often not the only ones guilty of participating in such activities. The same can be said about the selling of drugs in bars. Although the police did not want to comment too much about drug use and drug sales on the island, they did admit that it would be quite difficult for migrants from Myanmar to commit such acts without the help of local people. The officers concluded by stating that they felt that the small size of the island contributed to the spreading of rumors which blame migrant workers for all sorts of problems on the island.

Although the participants were able to recount stories that they had heard about the problems (increased unemployment among locals, increased crime rates, and the re-occurrence of previously eradicated diseases) caused by international, low-skilled migration to the island, especially of workers coming from Myanmar, no participant reported ever losing a job to a migrant worker, ever being a victim of a crime committed by a migrant worker, or had caught a rare disease that was previously eradicated that they could pin-point back to migrant workers. When the researcher asked the participants how they came to know this information to be true, many did not have a response. Many had heard these things from people that they knew and trusted and have come to believe them to be true rather than having any direct knowledge of such things. It is for this reason that the researcher must state that,

although there are some slight social and cultural impacts of immigration, these impacts have not been detrimental to the people of the island and have not majorly disrupted their ways of life. Although this finding is true at the time of the data collection for this research, the sudden stagnation of the tourism industry of Koh Phi Phi could change this situation drastically as migrants and locals start to compete for a limited number of jobs.

4.3 What strategies do local workers and host communities utilize in order to balance or overcome these effects?

The researcher spoke with many participants that had multiple jobs at the same time in order to combat low wages found in the tourism industry on the island, but whether or not this strategy was performed in direct response to an increase in migration is unclear. Many Thai participants themselves stated that they had never experienced wage reductions or an inability to find work due to labor migration, and therefore it is the belief of the researcher that this strategy was less about combating the effects of immigration rather than balancing low salaries in an expensive living space.

As far as strategies to combat social and cultural rights disturbances committed mostly by the Western migrant workers on the island, many residents have told the researcher that they choose different paths home in order to not meet the many tourists and Western workers on the island that have inconvenienced or offended them in the past. Also, although the researcher did not find evidence to support the fear of migrant workers from Myanmar, many local Thai residents also reported that they do not feel comfortable walking home at night alone, and often walk with a friend. In this respect, many of the local Thai residents have adapted their daily lives in order to combat the perceived social and cultural impacts of this international, low-skilled labor migration on the island, even though no evidence was gathered to legitimize this fear. Minimizing this fear through education and awareness, as well as a better understanding of migrants and the reasons why they come to Koh Phi Phi would be a good start to overcoming the obstacles that are currently blocking a true understanding

of the situation of international labor migration to the island, as perceived by the local people.

4.4 International, Low-skilled Labor Migration to Koh Phi Phi – Reality versus Attitudes

As discussed above, international, low-skilled labor migration to Koh Phi Phi has had relatively no impacts on the economic, social and cultural rights of the local laborers and residents of the island. Although this conclusion is supported by the data gathered in this study using qualitative research methods that targeted the local Thai population, the perceptions of the local population still highlight some negative attitudes towards migrant workers. These attitudes are the direct result of misinformation and rumors rather than being the direct result of experienced effects of the local people. Using some of the theories highlighted by Paas and Halapuu (2012) can help to understand why these perspectives exist in the presence of a lack of evidence to support these perspectives.

Human capital theory states that individuals with less education will be less tolerant to migrant workers (Paas and Halapuu, 2012). As most of the occupations on the island are low-skilled and therefore require lower qualifications, many of the island residents do not have a high level of education. This could be a contributing factor to the attitudes of the local Thai population towards the presence of migrant workers.

Individual economic theories suggest that individuals with less economic security will be less tolerant to migrant workers in their area (Paas and Halapuu, 2012). As many participants highlighted, the wages found in the tourism industry of Koh Phi Phi are not in sync with the high cost of living on the island. These low wages are not able to provide economic security for some local residents, as highlighted through the qualitative methods in this study. This is also evidenced by the many participants that are working multiple jobs in order to increase their income. This lack of economic security could also be a root to these attitudes towards migrant workers.

Possibly the most explanatory of Paas and Halapuu's individual theories of the attitudes of natives towards migrants is the cultural marginality theory that states

that the negative attitudes of natives towards migrants is a direct result of the lack of cultural understanding between the two groups (Paas and Halapuu, 2012). As highlighted previously in this study, populations of workers on Koh Phi Phi segregate themselves into groups and therefore there is relatively little interactions between the groups outside of the work environment. The lack of a common language also leads to cultural misunderstanding as most migrant workers do not speak Thai and very few local Thai people have more than a basic understanding of the English language. This self-imposed segregation seems to be having the largest impact on the local Thai perceptions of the migrant situation to the island.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

In closing, the researcher would have to admit that she did not find significant positive or negative impacts of international, low-skilled labor migration to the island of Koh Phi Phi on the local Thai laborers of the island. Rather than migrants from Myanmar coming to the island and stealing work from local Thai people as is rumored on the island, migrants are filling in a labor gap that has been created by the rapid expansion of the tourist industry on the island, combined with the small local Thai population of the island, some of whom are unwilling or unable to do some of the jobs in the industry. Because migrants in this context are taking jobs that local Thai workers do not want, the presence of migrant workers has had little effect on the local Thai workers on the island.

Economic impacts are felt, however, by those people who occupy similar jobs as some migrants, such as selling tickets and accommodation. When migrants are found in the same sector as Thai people, this does affect the economic benefits of the Thai person. If migrant workers are substitutes for local Thai laborers, negative impacts can be found, however, most migrant workers are complimentary workers and therefore relatively little economic impact is felt by the local Thai population.

Many participants stated that wages are low in the tourism industry of Koh Phi Phi, especially in relation to the high cost of living on the island. Although the tourism industry is creating many jobs for all people on the island, as has been heralded by many scholars and NGOs, the quality and remunerations of these jobs are questionable. It is the researcher's belief that the low wages of the tourism industry are not due to the increased number of migrant workers, but rather due to the nature of the industry, of which the RHRT states is notorious for low wages, long working hours and a lack of leisure time given to employees.

The researcher also did not find much evidence of other possible social and/or cultural impacts of such migration. Although there are an endless amount of stories concerning the poor behavior of migrant workers, from both Myanmar and Western countries, not many participants were able to say that they had any direct negative experiences with migrant workers. The police also indicated that most crime was actually committed by Thai people rather than foreign migrants. The officers blamed the over-exaggeration of the social problems caused by migrant workers on the small community setting, which allows for gossip to spread like a wildfire. One officer brought up the point that, “if a Thai person did it, no one talks, but if a foreigner does it, everyone talks.”

While there is a genuine fear that exists for many local Thai people on the island towards migrant workers from Myanmar especially, the researcher did not find any evidence to support or legitimize this fear. Although there have been crimes committed by migrant workers on the island, according to the police and a few local Thai residents, the local Thai people are more guilty of committing crimes than any other group on the island. If fear is the result of the number of crimes committed by a group of people, it would be logical that the local Thai residents would have more fear of each other than of outsiders on the island!

Many local Thai people did state that they had heard many stories and this is the reason why some are fearful of migrant workers. Although many participants had many stories to share with the researcher, these stories were more hearsay than fact, and even though the researcher searched for the source of these stories, the researcher was unable to locate one local Thai person that had been a victim of a crime committed by a migrant worker. This leads the researcher to the conclusion that the fear of migrant workers is perpetuated more by rumors and stories than by the actual occurrence of crimes on the island.

Even though there are not many incidents to legitimize this fear, the fear is still there for many local Thai people. Fears are perpetuated by the fact that many local Thai people do not interact with migrant workers, and many do not know any migrant workers personally. Those participants that work with migrant workers or have had interactions with migrant workers from Myanmar have mostly positive things to say about those migrants, aside from communication problems in the workplace.

Participants from Myanmar also admitted that they rarely had any interactions with local Thai people, and some confessed that they did not wish to interact with them, as they feel that the local Thai people look down upon them as low-class people. It is apparent that there is a large misunderstanding between the migrant population and the local Thai population. This is true for both migrants coming from other Asian countries as well as migrants coming from Western countries. More effort needs to be made on the part of the community and all of its members, both local Thai people and migrants alike, in order to bridge the communication gap that is leading to discord on the island.

Also, those migrants that wish to come to Koh Phi Phi to work and live must also respect the island and its local people. This applies to migrants coming from all countries. Although this study has found that the process of international, low-skilled labor migration has not violated the rights of the local Thai people on the island, it is still possible that individual migrant workers are violating the rights of some local Thai people. It is important that migrants understand and respect the local culture and the local people. Actions such as touching the local women should not be tolerated, and any person found guilty of violating women's rights should be sent to their home country.

Based on this study, the researcher has a few suggestions for the local community as well as the Thai Government concerning international, low-skilled labor migration to the island:

1. Migrant labor is needed to fill many of the jobs on Koh Phi Phi due to the lack of sufficient local Thai laborers on the island. Not only do many of the local Thai people not want the jobs or cannot do some of the jobs that migrant workers occupy, there just are simply too many jobs for not enough people on the island. The Thai Government needs to honor businesses seeking permission to employ migrant labor on the island. This measure would help to reduce the number of irregular migrant workers on the island, and would lead to better labor standards for both migrant and Thai laborers alike.

2. The community needs to bridge the communication gap between the migrant community and the local Thai community so that problems between the groups can be remedied. Local police as well as members of the Immigration and Labor Departments should also be involved in order to help stop rumors of negative effects caused by migrants in the community. This could work to help ease the fears of some of the local residents, allowing them to resume their daily lives without fear.
3. Migrant workers should have a good understanding of Thai culture prior to embarking on work in Thailand. This would help to ensure that cultural norms are not violated, which seems to be more based on misunderstanding rather than migrant workers wishing to cause harm to local people.
4. Businesses need to take responsibility for all of their workers, migrant and local, so that their presence does not impact the social harmony of the island through crime and other social impacts. It should be the responsibility of the business that employs migrant workers that those workers understand the culture of the island, as well as the local and national laws.
5. If individual migrant workers are found to have violated the rights of local Thai people, they should be sent back to their home countries. Not only would this stop the violation of rights, this would also discourage future violations of such rights by migrant workers.
6. More effort needs to be given to ensure that all migrant workers (both coming from other Asian countries and from Western countries) have the appropriate working documents prior to working on the island. Those workers with appropriate documentation pay taxes which help the community. This issue was also highlighted by many participants in this study.
7. Wages on Koh Phi Phi should reflect the cost of living on the island, both for local Thai laborers and migrant workers alike.

There should be a standard minimum wage that takes into consideration this high cost of living. This would help to ensure that competition between migrants and local Thai laborers (if there is any) would be based on merit and experience, not on financial gain due to low-cost labor.

8. Local community members must also work to develop skills that cater to the tourism industry and labor market, including the ability to speak English. Gaining these skills would make them more desirable candidates to potential employers.

Koh Phi Phi is a migrant island, both referring to international, low-skilled migration and the migration of Thai people from other parts of Thailand. It is important to bridge the communication gap in the community in order to work together to make Koh Phi Phi a safe, healthy, and happy environment for all that live and work there. Rumors of the negative impacts of international, low-skilled migration can only be stopped if both the local Thai population and the migrant community have an understanding of each other's cultures and ways of life, as well as motivations behind coming to the island. It is important for the local Thai population to develop skills that will help them secure employment on the island and possibly motivate employers to pay higher salaries for more qualified workers. The skills-building of the local population along with the wage standardization that reflects the cost of living on the island could help to ensure a more level playing field for all laborers on the island, local and migrant, thus securing the economic, social and cultural rights for all of the residents of Koh Phi Phi.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
TWO-PART NARRATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE
(ENGLISH VERSION)

Please answer the following questions about how you experience and adapt to labor migration on Koh Phi Phi. **Do not** include experiences that you have heard from other people, instead please only write about **direct experiences** that you have had. If you wish to write more, *please feel free to use the back of this paper for more space.*

How have you experienced international labor migration on Koh Phi Phi?

What strategies do you use to balance the effects of this labor migration to the island?

Personal Information

Sex: M F **Age:** _____ **Length of Residency:** _____

Occupation: _____

*Thank you very much for participating in this questionnaire! The information you provide will greatly contribute to a study on the effects of international, low-skilled labor migration to the island. For more information on the study, please contact **Khun Elizabeth**. Thank you again!*

APPENDIX C
TWO-PART NARRATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE
(THAI VERSION 2)

แบบสอบถามเชิงบรรยาย

กรุณาตอบคำถามต่อไปนี้เกี่ยวกับประสบการณ์และการปรับตัวของท่านต่อสถานการณ์การอพยพของแรงงานต่างด้าวมายังเกาะพีพี โปรดเขียนอธิบายจากประสบการณ์ตรงของท่าน ไม่ใช่ประสบการณ์ที่ได้ฟังจากเรื่องเล่าของคนอื่น หากพื้นที่เขียนตอบด้านล่างไม่พอ กรุณาเขียนคำตอบต่อด้านหลังของกระดาษ

ท่านมีประสบการณ์อย่างไรต่อสถานการณ์การอพยพของแรงงานต่างด้าวมายังเกาะพีพี

- ท่านมีความสัมพันธ์เกี่ยวข้องกับแรงงานต่างด้าวบนเกาะพีพีด้านใดบ้าง
- ท่านมีความรู้สึกอย่างไรกับการที่มีแรงงานต่างด้าวทำงานอยู่บนเกาะพีพี

ท่านมีแนวทางหรือวิธีการอะไรบ้างในการปรับตัวต่อสถานการณ์การอพยพเข้ามาทำงานของแรงงานต่างด้าวบนเกาะพีพี เพื่อไม่ให้มีผลกระทบต่อชีวิตความเป็นอยู่ของท่านและครอบครัวมากเกินไป

- ท่านตอบสนองอย่างไรต่อผลกระทบจากอพยพเข้ามาของแรงงานต่างด้าวบนเกาะพีพีถ้าแรงงานต่างด้าวเหล่านี้สร้างผลกระทบต่อท่านและครอบครัวท่านจะมีวิธีการจัดการอย่างไร

ข้อมูลส่วนตัว: เพศ: ชาย หญิง

อายุ: _____

อาชีพ: _____ ระยะเวลาที่อาศัยอยู่บนเกาะพีพี: _____

ขอบคุณที่กรุณาใช้เวลาตอบแบบสอบถามนี้ ข้อมูลที่ได้จากการตอบแบบสอบถามของท่านจะ
 ช่วยในการศึกษาวิจัยเรื่อง ผลกระทบของการอพยพของแรงงานต่างด้าวมายังเกาะพีพีหากท่าน
 ต้องการทราบข้อมูลเพิ่มเติมเกี่ยวกับงานวิจัยนี้ กรุณาติดต่อคุณอลิซาเบท

APPENDIX D
TWO-PART NARRATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE
(MYANMAR VERSION)

ကျေးဇူးပြုပြီး ကိုပီပီကျွန်း ပေါ် နိုင်ငံတကာ မှလုပ်အားများရွှေ့ပြောင်းနေထိုင်မှု နဲ့ ပတ်သက်ပြီး သင့်ရဲ့ အဆင်ပြေစွာ လိုက်လျော နေထိုင်မှုနှင့် ရရှိထားတဲ့ အတွေ့အကြုံ များနဲ့ စပ်လျဉ်း၍ အောက်ပါ မေးခွန်းများကိုဖြေဆိုပါ။ မေးခွန်းများကိုဖြေဆိုရာ တွင် သူတပါးရဲ့ အတွေ့အကြုံ များ ကို ဖြေကြားခြင်းမျိုး မပြုလုပ်ဘဲ မိမိကိုယ်တိုင် ရင်ဆိုင်တွေ့ကြုံရခဲ့တဲ့ သင်ခန်းစာ အတွေ့အကြုံများ ကိုသာ ဖြေကြားပေးပါ။ အကယ်၍ ပေးထားတဲ့ ကွက်လပ်နေရာမှာ ဖြေဆိုမဆန်ခဲ့ပါ က စာရွက်နောက်ကျောဘက် တွင် ရေးသား ဖြေဆိုနိုင်ပါသည်။

ကိုပီပီကျွန်း ပေါ် နိုင်ငံတကာမှ လုပ်သားများ ပြောင်းရွှေ့ နေထိုင်မှုနဲ့ စပ်လျဉ်းပြီး သင့်ရဲ့ရရှိထားတဲ့ အတွေ့အကြုံ များ ကို ဖြေကြားပါ။

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