



Trouble in Paradise: The Effects
of Immigration on Small Island
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Abstract

Immigration is a richly discussed topic in human rights, especially in Asia, however much of the focus is on the immigrants themselves and the conditions faced in the host country. Studies on the impacts of migration (internal and international) on local communities and labor markets yield mixed results. Some scholars (Foged and Peri, 2014; Hall, 2011; Cholewinski and Taran, 2010) remark on the benefits that host countries and communities receive from migrant labor in that it fills labor market gaps, helps boost global competitiveness for the country, and leads to upward mobility in employment for local workers. Others (Abdul-Rahman, et al., 2013; Pholiphirul,

2011; Orrenius and Zavodny, 2005) highlight the negative impacts of migration on the wages of local workers, the ability of local workers to find lucrative employment, as well as the possible effects of the dependence of countries on migrant work.

This paper will discuss the effects of immigration on small island communities in Thailand as related to the author's master's thesis. The unique context of small island communities allows for a closer look at the effects that immigration has on a work force due to the fact that other options for employment are not abundant. Unlike communities on the main land that may have access to other employment options, islanders must make the decision to migrate themselves if they wish to seek work in other sectors due to the limited industry on small islands. By analyzing the context of immigration on small island communities that have limited opportunities for upward mobility in employment, reduced access to other labor sectors, and a heavy dependency on tourism development, this paper explores if and how immigration affects the local labor forces and host communities of small island communities in Thailand.

Keywords: Economic rights, Low skilled labor migration, Native workers, AEC

Introduction

Although the opening of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) has been postponed until the end of 2016, it is nonetheless important to understand how the opening of the borders for labor migration will affect not only the migrants themselves as they face challenges in their new host countries, but also for the local people

and laborers of those host environments as they face changing employment options and remunerations as a result of the increase in available labor. The AEC Blueprint only addresses the migration of skilled labor however some critics feel that this is not sufficient to accommodate the growing number of low-skilled migrants seeking to fill employment vacancies in host countries (see Huelser and Heal, 2014; East Asia Forum, 2014). Thailand is considered a host country for labor migration in ASEAN (Martin and Abella, 2013), with most of its immigration going towards low-skilled sectors such as construction, manufacturing, and agriculture (Pholiphirul, 2012b). As ASEAN prepares to integrate the AEC in 2016, it is important to consider the effects such integration, especially with vast differences in development between ASEAN countries (AEC Blueprint, 2008), will have on migrants and local people alike. Such labor migration can have more than solely economic effects for workers, including social and cultural effects for the host country and local communities as well.

There has been much written about the conditions faced by migrant populations in Thailand, especially from Myanmar; however, there is a dearth of research and knowledge about the impacts of such migration on local laborers and host communities. This gap in knowledge concerning such impacts can have major consequences for local laborers as policy makers design immigration plans based on the statistical data put forth by researchers such as Foged and Peri (2014), Hall (2011), and Cholewinski and Taran (2010) who find that immigration benefits host countries and communities by filling labor market gaps, boosting the global competitiveness of a country and pushing native workers towards upward mobility in employment, or other researchers, such as Abdul-Rahman, et al. (2013), Pholiphirul

(2011), and Orrenius and Zavodny (2005) who find labor migration to have negative impacts on the local workers and host countries in that labor migration can depress the wages of local workers, affect local workers' ability to find viable employment, and can lead to the dependence of a country on migrant workers. While these studies bear differences in their findings, all the studies found by the researcher in her preliminary data collection utilized statistical data at the national or firm level. The researcher found no studies that analyzed the economic effects of immigration as reported by the local laborers and host communities themselves. It is for this reason that the main source of data in this study of the effects of low-skilled, international labor migration will come from the workers and local people captured from interviews with the researcher.

In preparation for the author's master's thesis concerning the impacts of such low-skilled, international labor migration on the local laborers of Koh Phi Phi, Thailand, the following paper will discuss the literature concerning economic rights in tourism employment, the economic impacts of low-skilled, international labor on native laborers in general, as well as highlight the immigration debate in Thailand. Finally, pulling from the works of Pongponrat (2015) and Soontayatron (2014), this paper will discuss the findings of other research projects concerning the impacts of labor migration on small island communities in Thailand, setting the background for possible outcomes of the author's own research. Small island communities provide a unique context in which to study the effects of low-skilled labor migration for many reasons, including (1) a limited labor force that can necessitate the use of migrant labor, (2) a small, tourism-driven island economy, and (3) limited avenues for occupational

mobility due to limited industry on small islands. The discourse on economic rights in relation to migration in Thailand has primarily focused on the rights of migrant workers or on the economic benefits that this labor migration brings to the country as a whole. The focus of this research will be on how that low-skilled, international labor migration impacts the economic, social and cultural rights of low-skilled Thai workers and the host community on Koh Phi Phi, Thailand.

Economic Rights in Tourism Employment

As Koh Phi Phi's primary economic driver is the tourism industry (as with most other islands in Thailand, and possibly the world), it is important to understand what economic rights can be affected by tourism employment, and what mechanisms are put in place to combat the violation of those rights. The following section will briefly discuss the human rights standards in place that are related to economic rights in tourism employment. These standards will then be used in the author's research to gauge which, if any, economic rights are being violated on Koh Phi Phi relating to tourism employment and immigration.

Tourism has been hailed as a savior for developing countries because of its ability to bring employment and much needed foreign direct investment to marginalized areas (RHRT, 2013). "Although often underestimated, the tourism industry can help promote peace and stability in developing countries by providing jobs, generating income, diversifying the economy, protecting the environment, and promoting cross-cultural awareness" (Honey and Gilpin, 2009, p. 1).

Rontos et al. (2012, p. 462) found that the “tourism industry is becoming the most important source of income and employment for the local economy, especially for island regions.” “The job creating capacity of tourism is one of its most significant and positive features,” states Shakeela, et al. (2011, p. 3). “There is growing enthusiasm amongst donor governments and international agencies for tourism to be viewed as having potential to contribute to pro-poor development” (Shan and Gupta, 2000, p. 1). The UNEP and UNWTO also confirm this enthusiasm (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005). This is primarily due to the increase in employment opportunities for local people attributed to tourism development (RHRT, 2013; UNEP and UNWTO, 2005). But while tourism has the potential to bring jobs and income into locations stricken by poverty, the need to maintain low costs in tourism development and the use of cheap, low-skilled migrant labor to fill labor gaps can have negative effects on local people, effectively violating their human right to work

The Roundtable on Human Rights in Tourism (RHRT) lists rights from the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), violations of some of which have been experienced by workers in the tourism and hospitality industry (2013). They include Article 23(1), (2), and (3), and Article 24. Article 23 states 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,” while Article 24 states that “everyone

has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitations of working hours and periodic holidays with pay” (UDHR). The RHRT describes the ways in which these rights can be violated in the tourism industry, citing that working conditions in the industry are tough, discrimination is rampant, and often wages are not as favorable as in other sectors (RHRT, 2013). The RHRT found that working hours are long, and workers do not receive the appropriate amount of leisure time, especially during peak seasons (RHRT, 2013).

The right to work is also illustrated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) under Articles 6-8. Although Article 6 refers to the freedom from slavery, it also states that state parties must safeguard this freedom by providing “technical and vocational guidance and training programs, 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). It is clear from this article that the duties of the state reach beyond allowing individuals the freedom to choose their employment, but also requires states to assist with training and creating policies that maintain decent living standards. Articles 7 and 8 also require states to assure fair wages without discrimination, a decent living wage for workers and their families, appropriate rest and leisure time, and the ability to form trade unions (ICESCR, Articles 7 and 8). Based on the information provided by the RHRT, it is evident that many businesses in the tourism industry violate these rights as listed in the ICESCR. state parties as well could be accused of not upholding their duties if they are not stepping in to regulate the tourism industry and its rampant labor rights violations. If labor

migration in relation to the tourism industry is not regulated, this would also be a failure of the state.

This research focuses on the effects of international low-skilled migration on native workers in the context of tourism development on Koh Phi Phi. If the influx of migrants as a cost-cutting strategy practiced by big businesses and developers is leading to the displacement of local workers, this would be an issue of economic rights violations as listed above. Also, if employers prefer to hire migrant workers over local workers for whatever reason, this discrimination would also be a violation of workers' rights. The Thai national minimum wage of THB300 per day does not take into account the high cost of living on Koh Phi Phi, where necessities such as water and electricity are reported to be up to five times as expensive as on the mainland. Although the current wage rates in the sector in this context are not yet known to the researcher, if these wages are low or have decreased with the increase of migrants laborers in the area, this could also be leading to economic displacement as workers look to other work to support their needs on the island. If these practices are leading to the violation of local workers' rights, these issues must be addressed through business practices and immigration policies.

The Economic Impacts of Low-Skilled Labor Migration on Native Laborers

Many studies have attempted to analyze the effects of migration on the local labor force through statistical data gathered at various levels (Foged and Peri, 2014). Foged and Peri (2014, p. 2) use longitudinal employer-employee data in an attempt to answer the questions

“Do immigrants displace similar native workers? Do they increase their jobless rates? Or do they complement them? And stimulate specialization of natives in complex tasks? Do these effects, combined, reduce or increase native wages?” As the objective of the author’s research is to answer similar questions by using qualitative research methods rather than quantitative, Foged and Peri’s work (2014) was consulted in order to better illustrate the potential impacts of migrant workers on the local labor force.

Foged and Peri seek to test the economic canonical model of immigration which stipulates that when the number of migrant workers increases, migrants begin to “crowd out” local workers, saturating the local labor market (2014, p. 3). “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 and Peri, 2014, p. 5). The results of their study suggested that an increase in the migrant work force often led to upward mobility for native workers that often came with higher wages and better conditions for those who took advantage of their situations (Foged and Peri, 2014). The researchers acknowledge that not everyone gains from the increased presence of migrant workers. They state 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 and Peri, 2014, p. 27).

Peri (2014) conducted his own research based on 27 different studies pertaining to the effects of immigration on the native labor force. He states that “most studies for industrialized countries have found no effect on wages, on average, and only modest effects on

wage differentials between more or less educated immigrant and native workers” (Peri, 2014, p. 1). Although he admits that a sudden increase in the influx of migrant workers may have slight effects on native wages, he proposes that certain “alternative mechanisms for wage adjustments” are not calculated by researchers whose findings indicate a negative relationship between migrant presence and native wages (Peri, 2014, p. 9). Those alternative mechanisms include upward employment mobility, native migration spurred by an influx of immigrants, and new employment opportunities created by increased migration (i.e. managerial positions, etc.) (Peri, 2014, p. 8). Peri (2014) argues that when these adaptive measures are taken into account, immigration produces relatively little effects for the local labor force.

Chassambouli and Palivos (2013) found a similar conclusion to Peri’s (2014) findings. Their research model allowed for the “presence of differential unemployment gains/costs between natives and immigrations, which serves to explain the equilibrium wage gap between otherwise identical native and immigrant workers” (Chassambouli and Palivos, 2013, p. 20). They identify how, because of a lack of other options, migrant workers are more willing to accept lower wages (Chassambouli and Palivos, 2013, p. 20). Although there may be other benefits for native workers caused by an increase in migrant workers, Chassambouli and Palivos fail to identify what, if any, those benefits are, and how, or under what circumstances, those benefits appear; finally, they conclude by finding “the overall impact on the wage of unskilled natives to be negative” (2013, p. 20) or unaffected.

While researchers such as Foged and Peri (2014), Peri (2014), and Chassambouli and Palivos (2013) suggest that migration is beneficial to native workers by pushing them towards upward

employment mobility and thus better wages, or at least, does not significantly harm native workers, others are more reserved about immigration and its benefits for the local labor force. De Haas (2010, p. 31) believes that “a bias towards migration and development success stories might obscure situations in which migration did contribute to worsening underdevelopment.” Borjas (2004) is an open critic of the impact of migrant workers on native workers. He cites economic models and statistical data to calculate the supply-demand relationship between increases in available labor and wages in a labor market.

Borjas states that “the textbook model of a competitive labor market predicts that an immigration influx should lower the wages of competing factors,” yet he illustrates that many studies only report a slight impact of immigrant labor on the wages of native workers (2003, p. 1337; 2004, p. 1).” He suggests looking deeper into the issue by isolating skill groups in order to better understand the effects of immigration on the labor force. The results of his study, which analyzed US census data between the years of 1980 and 2000, found that “the evidence consistently suggests that immigration has indeed harmed the employment opportunities of competing native workers” (Borjas, 2003, p. 1337). Borjas suggests that one of the reasons other researchers have not found a significant effect of immigration on the local labor force is due to their neglect of the phenomena of native migration due to an influx of migrant workers (2003, p. 1339), or what Peri (2014, p. 5) refers to as the “skating-rink” model. Whereas Peri (2014, p. 5) refers to the phenomenon as an “alternative mechanism for wage adjustment” that leaves the labor market of an area relatively unchanged due to native workers with similar skills migrating, leaving an employment gap that is filled by migrant workers, Borjas

sees (2003, p. 1351) this as a defense mechanism and the way that “natives may respond to the wage impact of immigration” in their local labor market, which involves “moving their labor or capital to other cities.” In conclusion, Borjas found that “immigrant influx reduced the wage of the average native worker by 3.2 percent” (2003, p. 1372). Pholiphirul (2011) finds this to be true in the Thai context as well, as will be discussed further below. Because of his analysis, Borjas is a strong supporter of “reducing the supply of labor by strict immigration enforcement and reduced legal immigration,” suggesting that it “would increase the earnings of native workers” (2004, p. 1).

Massey et al. (1994, p. 701) cite the neo-classical economic theory in that “migration exerts downward pressure on wages in destination countries and upward pressure on wages in sending countries until equilibrium is reached.” Although some studies that the group analyzed did reach this conclusion, other situations in other contexts in North America found that wages did not decrease as a result of the presence of immigrant labor. Even the International Organization of Migration (IOM) cites negative impacts of immigration on the local people, stating that “the benefits of migration accrue to employers and the migrants themselves while low-skilled Thai workers experience a net loss owing to reductions in employment and opportunities and marginally lower wages” (IOM Thailand, 2011, p. xiii). Abdul-Rahman et al. (2013) found that, in the Malaysian construction sector, the presence of migrant workers did in fact lower the wages for native workers in the construction industry. Orrenius and Zavodny (2005), when analyzing occupational-level data, found that immigration had a negative effect on local workers, especially low-skilled workers.

Understanding both the potential positive and negative impacts of low-skilled labor immigration on native populations is essential to this research in order to understand what possible impacts could be found through the researcher's study. Again, although there is a wealth of data on the possible impacts of such migration on native workers, this data has often relied on statistical calculations at the national or firm level, and thus does not solicit data from the native workers themselves, who are able to provide narratives as to how such immigration affects them in their daily lives and their pursuit of economic prosperity. The focus of the author's research is to allow the native Thai workers themselves to identify the impacts that increased low-skilled labor migration on Koh Phi Phi has had on their economic, social and cultural rights.

International Low-Skilled Immigration into Thailand

Even though the integration of the ASEAN Economic Community has been postponed from 2015 to the end of 2016, low-skilled labor migration is still not addressed in the AEC Blueprint (AEC Blueprint, 2008). Thailand, in response to a growing concern over the entry of irregular workers, signed bilateral agreements with Myanmar, Cambodia, and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). These bilateral agreements, or Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs), seek to regularize recruitment procedures for low-skilled laborers from those countries as a way to curb irregular migration (Vasuprasat, 2008; Thailand, 2011; Pholphirul, 2012b). The following section will briefly highlight the phenomenon of low-skilled labor migration into Thailand, as well as how this labor migration has affected the native Thai workers.

Low-skilled labor migration is prevalent in Thailand, especially for laborers originating from the neighboring countries of Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos PDR. According to the International Office of Migration (IOM) Thailand, more than 3.5 million people who do not hold Thai nationality are living in the Kingdom of Thailand; of those 3.5 million, more than 3 million are working within the country (IOM, 2011). Scholars attribute the need for low-skilled labor migration on the rural-to-urban migration that occurred in the mid-1980s to early 1990s when “the country moved from low-end, labor intensive operations to more capital- or technology-intensive manufacturing industries” (Chalamwong, 2011, p. 12). According to Chalamwong (2012) and Hall (2011), Thai workers sought employment in higher-skilled sectors, leaving a labor shortage in the rural agricultural areas. This movement of people from the countryside to the manufacturing areas led to the need for more low-skilled laborers, primarily coming from outside the country.

Kulkolkarn and Pottipiti (2009, p. 23) trace the concern of Thai citizens about immigration and its impacts on the native Thai laborers back to the Asian Economic Crisis of 1997 “when the unemployment rate rose markedly.” According to their findings, “the availability of cheap migrant labor was viewed as a factor reducing the opportunities for employment of native workers and their wages” (Kulkolkarn and Pottipiti, 2009, p. 23). Kulkolkarn and Pottipiti’s research (2009, p. 28) analyzes data collected by the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) using a computable general equilibrium (CGE) model, through which they found that “the presence of 700,000 unauthorized migrants in 1995 decreased the wages of Thai workers with primary or lower level education by 3.5 percent.”

Sanganet (2004) recognizes the desirability in hiring laborers from Myanmar over local Thai laborers, a practice that could be labeled as discriminatory to the Thai workers. Sanganet states that “pressure to migrate is exacerbated by the demand for cheap labour, which is caused either by labor shortages in natural resource-based economies or by the existence of socially undesirable (to nationals) jobs” (2004, p. 14). Sanganet continues by stating the migrant workers are “willing to do work that nationals refuse to do or at a wage unacceptable to nationals” (2004, p. 14). While hiring migrant workers can be beneficial for employers and the migrants themselves as they pursue better economic opportunities than can be obtained in their home countries, the IOM acknowledges that “low-skilled Thai workers experience a net loss owing to reductions in employment and opportunities and marginally lower wages” (IOM Thailand, 2011, p. xiii).

The Impacts of Low-Skilled Labor Migration in Small Island Communities in Thailand

While scholars have attempted to analyze socio-cultural effects and perceptions of migration on small island communities in Thailand, they do not seem to focus on the economic impacts of those migrants on local laborers. To date, the author has not found any studies that have attempted to research this phenomenon, especially in the case of Thailand. This section will instead focus on the socio-cultural effects of immigration to Koh Samui, another popular tourist destination island in the south of Thailand, as illustrated through the works of Kannapa Pongponrat (2015) and Somruthai Soontayatron (2014), in order to better understand the

possible impacts and perceptions of labor migration on island communities.

Soontayatron (2014, p. 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; his work analyzes the socio-cultural impacts (and not economic or employment impacts) of the internal migration of laborers from Isan, the northeastern region of Thailand, to Koh Samui. Soontayatron finds that “tourism also creates new employment opportunities in the host area and it influences migration patterns” (2014, p. 2). Soontayatron also highlights Koh Samui’s “uncomplicated small-scale society with limited population and unique culture” as a reason why socio-cultural impacts may be more visible on the island than in other contexts (2014, p. 3). While Soontayatron finds that tourism development can bring positive socio-cultural changes to a community, he also found that the participants in his study perceived many negative impacts of the labor migration that the tourism development brought to the island. Women interviewed in his study stated that they had a fear of Isan people, who the participants differentiated from Thai people (2014, p. 4). In the study, participants stated that Isan people were seen as “uneducated,” “untrustworthy,” and “bad people,” and as a consequence, many of the negative socio-cultural impacts of tourism development were attributed to Isan people by the participants in his study (2014, p. 10).

Pongponrat (2014) also analyzes domestic labor migration of Isan workers to Koh Samui, especially as it is related to the tourism industry on the island. In her study, Pongponrat utilizes document

analysis and in-depth interviews to identify significant issues of socio-cultural changes in relation to domestic labor migration on the host community in order to provide guidelines for planning and managing domestic labor migration for local tourism development (2015). As the author is also interested in the impacts of labor migration on host communities, especially economic impacts on native laborers, this study was consulted in order to help develop the research methodologies needed to address this issue from the perspective of the workers themselves.

Pongponrat found that, although tourism has “brought Thailand benefits such as higher employment, government revenue, [and] foreign exchange,” these benefits are felt most by business owners and the government, with much fewer benefits going to the host community and its people (2015, p. 773). Although she recognizes that “tourism growth has created employment opportunities across all tourism and travel-related industry sectors” (2015, p. 773), the employment gap created by an increased number of available jobs and a limited number of laborers can lead to labor migration, and that labor migration can have negative impacts on the local community. Labor migrants (both internal and international) bring with them their cultures and lifestyles, which may disrupt the local community (Pongponrat, 2015). Pongponrat concludes, quite obviously, that “as tourism development creates highly tourist-dependent economic activities, it is tempting not only non-local Thai people but also foreigners to move and settle down in Koh Samui for income generating opportunities” (2015, p. 775). While Pongponrat addresses socio-cultural impacts of labor migration on a host community, such as the perceptions of increased crime, health care

issues, and quality of life concerns (2015), this study did not address economic impacts or the violation of economic rights that can be caused by the influx of low-skilled labor migrants, as explained above.

Although these studies did not directly address the concept of economic rights of native workers in the face of increasing labor migration, they do illustrate common perceptions held by native communities of the consequences of immigration. These perceptions and attitudes are not only found in Koh Samui, Thailand; many other scholars have highlighted these nativistic or xenophobic tendencies of native residents all around the globe (see Peri, 2014; Hutanuwatr et al, 2013; Cholewinski and Taran, 2010; King, 2012; Hall, 2011). This research will also attempt to identify if these same perceptions and attitudes exist in Koh Phi Phi. If negative sentiments exist towards migrant workers on Koh Phi Phi, could this affect the impacts of migration as reported to the researcher by the workers themselves?

Preliminary Field Work: Koh Phi Phi, Krabi Province, Thailand

A small island community like Koh Phi Phi presents a very unique context in which to analyze and understand the impacts of low-skilled, international labor migration on the native work force for a few reasons. First, Koh Phi Phi is a small island with a small native work force that is unable to meet the labor demands of the tourism industry. Hotel managers on Koh Phi Phi who participated in Horn et al.'s (2006, p. 15) study on the effects of the 2004 tsunami on society, the economy, and the environment in Krabi Province (with special

emphasis on Koh Phi Phi) stated that while they felt there would be “plenty of tourist” after the tsunami, they felt that “the problem is where to get enough employees.” Secondly, Koh Phi Phi, as with many islands in Thailand and around the world, is heavily dependent upon the tourism industry to meet the economic needs of the community. As highlighted by Dodds (2010, p. 251), “tourism development is often sought, particularly in relatively poor warm-water islands, as one of the limited number of economic options.” Finally, due in part to the reliance on the tourism industry and the small size of island communities, there exists limited industry on many islands, limiting the potential for upward employment mobility, often identified as a positive effect of immigration on the native work force. By analyzing the impacts of low-skilled migration on the native Thai workers on Koh Phi Phi as reported by the workers themselves, this research seeks to fill the gap in knowledge relating to economic rights of native laborers.

Proposed Research Plan and Current Mid-Term Analysis

The field work on Koh Phi Phi began in July 2015. The researcher anticipates the field research to take approximately six months for completion, depending on the availability of participants that have left the island to be interviewed. Observations will be conducted throughout the field research period in order to understand attitudes and behavior between Thai workers and migrant workers. The interviews will be divided into four categories based on who will be interviewed and what information will be sought through the interviews. This research will interview experts in the field of immi-

gration in Thailand with an emphasis on immigration in the Andaman region or in relation to the tourism industry; long-time residents of the island in order to understand labor and migration trends (substituting for non-existent or incomplete census and immigration data); Thai laborers on the island as well as Thai laborers that have moved from the island in order to understand any effects of immigration or other facts related to economic and employment rights; and finally employers in order to understand motivations behind hiring migrant labor and local Thai labor. Through these methods, the researcher will analyze what, if any, are the impacts of low-skilled labor migration on Thai workers in Koh Phi Phi, and how those impacts affect the economic, social, and cultural rights of Thai residents.

Although field research is not yet complete, there are a few conclusions the researcher has drawn based on interviews with participants and my own observations in the field. Koh Phi Phi is a very special case as its constant development to sustain tourism demands means there is not a static labor market. Since the labor market is constantly growing, and perhaps only contracting slightly due to seasonal demands, the canonical model of the effects of immigration on the labor market does not apply to this case. Koh Phi Phi's labor market is constantly expanding and the researcher has not found that migrant workers are taking a limited number of jobs, but rather that they are coming to fill newly created jobs, or filling vacancies created by local Thai people leaving former positions to fill newly created positions. The data the researcher has gathered thus far leads her to the conclusion that migrant workers are not driving down the demand for labor by increasing the supply of labor or taking jobs from local Thai people.

The researcher has found evidence of upward employment mobility, but whether this mobility is due to an influx of migrant workers or simply due to the increased availability of jobs is still unclear. The researcher has also found alternative mechanisms for wage adjustments as indicated by Peri (2014), but whether those adaptive strategies are in response to increased migration or the low wages in the tourism industry on Koh Phi Phi are still unknown. The most common of these adaptive strategies include obtaining multiple employment and native migration – natives seeking employment in other locations in order to overcome the low wages found in Koh Phi Phi’s tourism sector. The researcher would not consider this to be evidence of the benefits of increased labor migration, rather she would classify this as adaptive survival mechanisms used to balance poor remunerations found in the tourism industry.

The researcher has heard from one employer that they do systematically pay their migrant staff about THB1,000 lower per month than their Thai employees. This would be evidence of the violation of migrant worker’s labor rights; however, this would not be indicative of any abuse of native workers’ labor rights.

From the conversations the researcher has had with migrant workers on the island, there is no sense of accepting lower wages because of the “lack of other options” as identified by Chassambouli and Palivos (2013, p. 20). Instead, the migrants on the islands, especially those coming from Myanmar, were happy about the opportunity to work for such wages as the wages and living conditions on the island are still much better than in their home countries. Also, some migrant workers are paid better wages than their Thai counterparts, which seems to indicate that there may be other motivations behind hiring

migrant workers aside from the cheapness of the labor. Even Western tourists who are working on the island do not accept lower wages because they have no other options. Wages in Western countries are far higher than what tourists earn working on Koh Phi Phi; however, working for the wages on the island allows them to have the lifestyle they want by giving them enough funds to sustain their partying habits and accommodation expenses.

Whereas Borjas (2004) suggests reducing immigration to increase the earnings of local workers, the researcher is not sure this would work on Koh Phi Phi. Although this might allow for current workers to demand higher salaries, this would create a very large gap in the labor market and there are not enough local Thai people to fill this gap. The workers may be able to demand better salaries, however the researcher feels this would lead to increased responsibilities for some individuals and longer working hours, as observed with one participant whose employer had reduced their staff due to migrant workers who were unable to understand orders given to them by their Thai employer. While the researcher has found evidence of stagnant wages, she has not found anything, including migrant labor, which has reduced wages on the island.

Discriminatory hiring practices operate both ways on the island. There are many local Thai employers who feel Thai people are lazy and do not want to do the work that migrants are willing to do and those employers choose to hire migrant labor over local Thai labor. Other employers with different experiences with their migrant staff claimed that they will not hire migrant laborers again as the labor is inefficient. They have indicated to the researcher that while migrant labor may be cheaper, migrants often do not have a high

level of Thai language skills, which causes many problems for the employer. The researcher did find evidence of ethnic and religious discrimination towards Thai Muslim women on the island, as one non-Thai employer stated that they were reluctant to hire local women as this employer was afraid that the head scarf worn by these women would be bad for business.

There is evidence that some local residents feel the same way about migrants from Myanmar as the local residents of Koh Samui feel about migrants from Isan in the works of Soontayatron (2014) and Pongponrat (2015). Increased crime and the spread of previously eradicated diseases on Koh Phi Phi have all been blamed on increased migration, yet when follow up questions are asked of participants as to how they have come to know this information to be true, many participants do not have first-hand experiences of such social impacts. Other residents and workers on the island indicated that they had no problems with migrant workers on the island. They feel that any economic problems that people feel are caused by an increase in the migrant labor supply is more due to the work ethic and abilities of those Thai workers than to migrants on the island. Those participants also indicated that they have never had a problem with migrant workers in a social context.

Contrary to what was stated in the abstract, Koh Phi Phi seems to have an abundance of job opportunities for those who wish to work, irrespective of the limited industries on the island. The numerous 'help wanted' signs (in both Thai and Burmese languages) could be considered evidence of such an expanding job market. This is most likely due to the ever-growing and developing tourism industry on the island. The researcher would place Koh Phi Phi at the Develop-

ment Stage of Butler's 1980 Tourist Area Cycle of Evolution based on Breakey's description, which indicates a high number of tourists, implementation of national policy in local tourism development, and the presence of migrant workers (Breakey, 2005, p. 71). It would be very interesting to see if the results of this study hold true once the development of the island slows and the number of available job opportunities starts to stabilize.

Conclusion

Although the issue of the impacts of low-skilled labor migration on native workers has not been neglected in human rights and immigration discourse, the knowledge accumulated seems to focus on statistical data calculated through census and wage information at a national or firm level, leaving out the voices of the actual laborers concerned. There is a need to fill this gap in the knowledge in order to better inform policies related to low-skilled immigration, not only in Thailand but also regionally and globally. Analyzing the effects of low-skilled labor migration on a small island presents a unique context in that the migrant labor is necessary due to a limited labor force; small islands are typically heavily dependent on the tourism industry for their economic needs; and the small geography as well as the reliance on the tourism industry limits other industries on the islands, and therefore, limits the availability of upward employment mobility, commonly cited as a positive impact of immigration. Although limited in its applicability to other contexts for various reasons, this research will nonetheless add much valuable data to our understanding of the impacts of immigration on native populations.

With the future integration of the AEC and numerous pushes for the AEC to incorporate the free flow of low-skilled labor in the region, it is important to understand the impacts of such migration, not only on the migrants themselves and the conditions they face in the host community, but also the host community and local laborers and the economic, social, and cultural effects they face in the wake of an increase in the labor supply. By including the voices of those laborers themselves, it is the author's desire to empower native laborers to have a voice in policy related to low-skilled labor migration that affects their communities and their livelihoods.

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