“Bikinis and fish don’t match”
Exploring conflicts and local development of tourism in Ngapali, Burma

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Abstract
Against a backdrop of local, regional and national conflicts the former generals now in government, have decided to focus on tourism and have worked hard since 2010 to develop Burma’s tourism sector. Ngapali, a small coastal community in Rakhine state has been developed into a tourism destination with hotels and restaurants, all located on a beautiful beach. Tourism has great implications for communities, both negative and positive. For Ngapali the development of tourism led to an increased amount of jobs in the tourism sector. The access to hospitality training and education also increased. Educated and trained staff were able to demand higher wages for themselves and they managed to access further hospitality training at other tourist destinations in Burma. The few Burmese Rohingya employed at the hotels did unfortunately not share this rather empowered position the Burmese Buddhists had as they fell victim to severe discrimination. Unfortunately the development of tourism in Ngapali led to a conflict between the hotels located at the beach and the fishermen who traditionally had used the beach for drying fish. The lack of participation from local population in the development of tourism was also problematic. The Burmese government chose to design the tourism sector in Ngapali as they pleased without taking the local community into account. The use of hotel zones, sand mining, lack of infrastructure thus leading all tourists to fly to Ngapali, the fact that the hotels used already scarce water and electricity resources and the discrimination and ill-treatment of marginalized groups made the tourism sector unsustainable. In addition to these local conflicts and issues the over-all situation in Rakhine, and even Burma, make the future for Ngapali as a tourism destination very uncertain.

Keywords: tourism, Burma, Myanmar, Ngapali, Rohingya, anthropology, development
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List of all informants

Vicky: Myanmar Centre for Responsible business (MCRB)
Khang: Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB)
Anna: Staff at European embassy in Yangon that founded tourism projects
Aung: Boat driver in Ngapali
Khine: Fruit seller Ngapali
Su: Teacher Lindthar village (Ngapali) English language training school
Myat: Restaurant owner Ngapali
Frank: International General Manager Ngapali
Sara: International assistant General Manager Ngapali
Min: Local front desk staff Ngapali
Pat: Local staff at hotel Ngapali
Jay: Local staff at hotel Ngapali
Jim: Local staff at ECO hotel Ngapali
Hans: Local staff at a non-governmental organisation (NGO) working with sustainable tourism
Dieter: General Manager at hotel in Yangon
Joshua: Local teacher at a hospitality training school
Lina: Swedish hotel and restaurant workers’ union (HRF)
Yong: The International Union for food, agriculture, hotel, restaurant, catering, tobacco and allied workers’ association representative (IUF)
Htet: Agriculture and Farmers Federation of Myanmar (AFFM) representative
Steve: Representative of the ILO (international labour organisation) in Burma
Greg: Flora and Fauna

In addition numerous people, both Burmese and international, helped me answering my questions and I am very grateful for all my informal chats that helped me understand Burma and its tourism sector.
“Tourism has some aspects of showbiz, some of international trade in commodities; it is part innocent fun, part a devastating modernizing force. Being all these things simultaneously, it tends to induce partial analysis only”.

Victor Turner, 1974
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References
Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Purpose and aim

The overall aim in my master thesis is to research if tourism can be a tool for poverty reduction and development in Burma, and more specific if it could be this in the small costal community of Ngapali. In a much broader context I wanted to understand if tourism could lead to development and what would need to be in place for this to happen. The Burmese government have had a strong focus on developing the country’s tourism sector and I wanted to see if that focus had benefitted the Burmese and the Rakhine population. What kind of focus had the government when they developed tourism? How did the development of tourism affect Ngapali? My research plan started out aiming to understand if tourism could lead to job opportunities for the local population and by that the betterment of livelihoods. Several conflicts at my field site become of great importance; although I had not expected that they influenced my fieldwork and my thesis to the extent they did. This thesis is therefore a case study of the tourism in Ngapali, but with a specific focus on job opportunities for local population.

The material for this master thesis consists mainly of interviews, observations and academic articles from within the fields of anthropology, tourism and development. This research could not have been done without my fieldwork, as there were very limited information of Ngapali and tourism in the area from the academic field. My theoretical framework and much of the background was covered by the academic articles and supported me in answering my research questions. The fieldwork and especially the interviews conducted during the fieldwork were though of great significance. I would not have been able to answer my research questions without the local knowledge I gained during my fieldwork.

Method used for this thesis consist of a ten weeks fieldwork in Burma, were five of these weeks were spent in Ngapali. In Ngapali I conducted in-depth interviews with various workers in the tourism sector and in addition I had several informal chats with other workers I did not manage to conduct a proper sit down interview with. I explained to everyone I was there to conduct research for my master thesis in
anthropology. I was also able to use observation to a certain extent as well. In addition desk research in the form of a literature review was conducted.

Poverty alleviation and how to achieve it, is widely debated amongst various experts and scholars. Traditional aid has long been criticized and although I still believe traditional aid is needed there must be room for other ideas and solutions. Innovative ideas in areas such as for instance cash transfers and trade are beginning to achieve wider support. In this thesis I want to bring attention to tourism and its potential for poverty alleviation. Most of us travel in one way, or the other, and thus have the possibility to directly contribute to sustainable tourism development in the destinations we choose to visit. One may travel to a developing country for work or on holiday and with the right knowledge the choices we take as travellers may have an affect on the country we visit in a positive way. As travellers/consumers we have the possibility to demand sustainable solutions and acts from the tourism sector. To a certain extent we are depended on the sector itself to be willing to act in a sustainable way. Countries such as Burma with a top down and centralized planning process make the travellers in addition depended on at least some cooperation or willingness from the government to find sustainable solutions. This thesis therefore provides general knowledge of how one can travel sustainable, which can be applied on various developing countries even if the thesis has a specific focus on Burma and Ngapali.

I became interested in Burma when pre-researching the tourism sector in Asia. After the semi-democratic election in 2010 Burma started opening up and focusing on developing and expanding their tourism sector. I thought it would be very interesting to do research in a country that just started to design their tourism industry. When starting to design a tourism sector in 2010, Burma had the opportunity to learn from other countries’ mistakes and to counteract known negative effects of tourism. I gained an interest in job opportunities for local population in the tourism sector as according to UNWTO (2014) much work in the tourism sector is low skilled work, and even lack of English for certain jobs would not be a problem. In addition the tourism industry is a labour extensive sector.
My anthropological contribution concerns the effects of the emerging tourism sector on workers in Ngapali, Burma. This is an understudied topic in the anthropological literature and little attention has of yet been given to effects of tourism in Burma. My contribution lies in the deeper understanding of the different situations and the different conflicts that may arise from the emerging tourism. The emerging tourism sector has different meaning and consequences for the local population. My contribution is not primarily theory development; my contribution revolves around nuancing the tourism sector and it is through my empirical data and my fieldwork I aim to do so.

1.2 Burma or Myanmar/Rangoon or Yangon?

An explanatory paragraph on the choice of name of the country used in this thesis is important. Burma was the official name on the country until 1989 when the ruling military junta changed the name to Myanmar. The official name is today Myanmar. The military junta stated that Burma was the name that the British gave the country, during their colonial rule. Burma has around 135 ethnic groups, where the majority Bamar is by far the greatest. The military junta stated that the name Burma only took this majority group into account. The name Myanmar on the other hand included all 135 ethnic groups according to the junta (Lintner 2014:7). An important distinction to bear in mind is that the majority group in Burma is the Bamar, and that the people of Burma as a country are called the Burmese, or after the junta changed it, Myanmar.

Anthropologist Christina Fink (2009:5) explains that she chooses to use the name Burma because the military junta changed the name without consulting with its people. Gravers and Ytzen (2014:2) explains that even before independence the name Burma had expanded to refer to the country as a whole, not just the majority group, the Bamar. It is argued today that Myanmar is more including towards the country’s ethnic groups, although ethnic groups themselves do not like being categorized as Myanmar.

It is my clear impression after extensive research that opposition groups and activists still uses the name Burma because of the military junta’s undemocratic change of the country’s name. It has been a difficult decision for me to choose which name to use
on the country in my thesis, as both the names of the country is closely connected to both politics and values, and there are very good arguments for both of the names. I decided upon using the name Burma and I did this because the opposition still chooses this name. From my several visits to the country I learned that the local population themselves uses Burma and Myanmar interchangeably thus making this less of an issue than it could have been. The language of Burma is called Burmese, but the new official name is Myanmar (language). I learned that these two also were used interchangeable. The former capital Rangoon changed name to Yangon, and this is a name change that stuck. Very seldom I heard people refereeing to Rangoon. Because of this I choose to use the name Yangon throughout this thesis.

1.3 Defining development and tourism

Numerous definitions of development exist, but as Nolan (2002) states, improvement, empowerment and participation are key terms in most definitions. Improvement refers to forms of betterment that local populations accept, value and understand. Empowerment is explained as building of local capacities for the planning and the management of the changes associated with improvement. Participation when speaking of development means that different members of a society (all groups) are involved in decisions that will affect their lives, now and in the future. According to Escobar (1991) the number of anthropologists involved in developing projects since the mid-1970s has been growing steadily thus one can talk about development anthropology as a sub discipline. Anthropologists are sometimes doubly damned according to Gow (1993) as they are widely criticised both by fellow academics and development professionals.

Hylland Eriksen (2007) describes tourism destinations as being two places at the same time, a local community and a holiday destination. The local population live in the towns the tourists come to visit. Hylland Eriksen (ibid.) also describes the evolution of tourism from local, to regional and finally to global, as tourism has developed, at least in the richer part of the world. The mass-tourism has unfolded quite synchronically in most parts of the world. Forty years ago you went on vacation to a local place, twenty years ago interrail was popular and now people travel to Asia and South-America.
Tourism, as development, has numerous definitions but I choose to use an explanatory sentence from Smith (1977,1989), as it is not too specific but instead provides an introduction into the subject of tourism.

“Tourism is difficult to define because business travellers and convention-goers can combine conferences with tourist-type activities; but, in general, a tourist is a temporarily leisured person who voluntarily visits a place away from home for the purpose of experience a change.” Smith (1977,1989).

UNTWO (2017) stated that the world saw 1.235 million international tourist arrivals in 2016 and that the total revenue in the tourism industry was $ 1.220 billion. In addition UNWTO (ibid.) states that 1 in 10 job around the world is in the tourism sector.

1.4 Introducing the anthropology of tourism
According to Wallace (2005) the anthropology of tourism is a rather new topic in both academic and applied anthropology. He gives Smith’s edited work, *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism* (1977) credit for sparking an anthropological interest in tourism. Before this anthropologists were hesitant to research tourism and its effects, Wallace (ibid) states, but today as tourism has become a worldwide phenomena anthropologists cannot overlook it. Crick (1985, 1989), Cohen (1979, 1984) Nash (1977, 1981), Bruner (1995, 1996) and Graburn (1977, 1981) are all anthropologists that have according to Wallace (ibid.) shaped and affected the anthropology of tourism. In addition academic anthropologists have mainly been preoccupied with the negative effects of tourism, and many times this has come about because they have seen their own site of fieldwork become overrun by tourists. Wallace (ibid.) purpose that instead of this, perhaps anthropologists should view tourism as one of many change factors and that that it is not only good or bad, but instead tourism must be looked upon as one of the world’s largest industries.

Wallace (ibid.) explains that anthropologist have been (and many still are) ambivalent of the study of tourism. Stronza (2001) have observed some of the same issues as Wallace and she explains how research on tourism has been deemed unworthy in
anthropology, or at least less important than many other topics. Crick (1995) touches upon another interesting issue: how earlier anthropologists may have been hesitant to research tourism because as a concept it is too similar to anthropology. Tourists’ accounts and anthropologists’ accounts may in fact be quite similar especially when the focus is on social and cultural phenomena. Anthropologists are professionals and tourists are not, and according to Crick (ibid.) it was important to for anthropologists to distinguish themselves from the tourists.

Wallace (2005) describes how anthropologists have chosen to work with and/or research tourism very differently. Applied anthropologists may work with tourism as consultants, analysts, mediators and researchers, while other anthropologists show how anthropological theory and practice intersect with theoretical and practical perspectives of tourism. The third way anthropology may interact with tourism is when anthropologists act as tour guides or in other ways become actors in the tourism sector. Wallace (ibid.) points out that this last form of interaction is where the distinction between an anthropologist and a tourist begin to blur.

Stronza (2001) points out how an anthropologist and a tourist seem to be quite alike or share some common features. They both carry the status as an outsider while they try to get into peoples lives and both explore cultural productions and rituals of the society. Though anthropologists may dislike the comparison, tourism may be an ideal context for studying issues of political economy, development, cultural identity and social change according to Stronza (ibid.). She continues with a suggestion that anthropological research of tourism can be divided into two halves. One half aimed to understand the origin of tourism and the other half seek to understand the impact of tourism.
Chapter 2 – Methodology

I chose to use a standard anthropological method. Interviews and (participant) observation were a part of my fieldwork. My interviews were mainly semi-structured but I also chatted with many in a very informal way, which highly contributed to my understanding of Burma, Ngapali and the tourism sector in that area.

2.1 Fieldwork in Yangon and Ngapali

Fieldwork took place ten weeks between January 2014 and March 2014. Five weeks of these were spent in Ngapali. I also visited the tourism destinations of Inle Lake and Bagan, as I wanted to get a more general impression of the tourism sector. I chose to base myself in Yangon where most people connected with tourism development are located. Yangon itself is also a tourism destination, but being the country’s biggest city, the de-facto capital and the entry point for most tourists it becomes a tourist destination almost by default. I wanted to do research in a destination where tourists actively chose to travel to. I became very interested in the small coastal community of Ngapali and decided to do five weeks of fieldwork there. It would have been very interesting to spend much more time in Ngapali but unfortunately the living costs are very high there.

Hylland Eriksen (2000:25) explains that a fieldwork may last from a few months to two years, or even longer. The length may differ, but in general the anthropologist should stay in the field long enough to make he or she’s presence natural for the local population. My ten weeks, or in fact five weeks, in Ngapali was rather short in comparison, and this worried me prior to departure. To my advantage though was that Ngapali was, a destination tourists normally visited for three or four days. Five weeks was an incredible long period of time for a foreigner to spend in Ngapali. People got used to me being there, hanging around and asking questions. Still I would have liked to have the opportunity to spend even more time in Ngapali, as I am sure it would have benefitted my research. Key informants are very valuable for the fieldwork. Bernard (2006:196) defines key informants, as informants who you can talk to effortlessly, informants that understand what kind of data you are interested in, and would help you to collect it. I would call two of my informants in Ngapali key informants. In Ngapali I met with, among others, one international (assisting) General
Manager (GM) and one local staff. They worked in two different hotels and that proved to be very knowledgeable. It was these two that made me realize to the full extent how difficult it were for Muslims in Ngapali and Rakhine. I did conduct several interviews before I met these two, but just as Bernard (2006:199) suggest it may be worth it not choosing key informants too quickly.

I conducted around twenty-five interviews in Yangon, Ngapali and Inle Lake that I would consider important to my research. A few interviews were of so little value that they are not a part of this thesis, and some interviews ended up being irrelevant to my research as my focus shifted throughout my fieldwork. Nonetheless all interviews broadened my knowledge. Unfortunately when I arrived in Burma my contact person that I were hoping to become one of my key informants told me she did not have time for me, at all. As I recovered from this I realized I had to start from scratch as to get informants. I contacted several organizations working with tourism and I actually did manage to find a decent selection of different informants in Yangon. People (both local and international) working with tourism development all seemed to know each other so when interviewing one person I always went from the interview with a couple of recommended people to interview. Especially people who were recommended to be from several interviews I made sure to contact. This is what Bernard (2006:193) calls snowball technique. Not everyone was relevant but the snowballing effect was very helpful. It helped me in mapping the tourism development actors and gave me an excellent overview of the sector. Since I was quite desperate to meet up with people in the beginning I met with many of the ones who were recommended to me, but soon I could actually afford to choose.

In Ngapali I went around to the different hotels and asked to speak with the different GMs and other staff at the hotels. The area is small with about twenty hotels so this could be done quite easily. In addition I talked to, and interviewed fruit sellers on the beach, boat drivers, and workers in the restaurants. In Yangon and Ngapali, with the GMs and staff in the hotels I used semi-structured interviews (Bernard, 2006:212). Seeing as I had a limited amount of time, semi-structured interviews was the best option for me in order to gain a good understanding of the situation for workers in the tourism sector. According to Bernard (ibid), semi-structured interviews come with an
interview guide, a set of questions and topics to be covered. When interviewing these people there was also a time limit to the interview. They were all working full-time and since the tourism sector saw rapid growth, they were all working a lot of overtime, so it was clear to me that I needed to be efficient in my interviews. I still appreciated the amount of freedom in this type of interviews, if something came up I could pursue it and then I would go back to my topic and set of questions. A constant challenge in these interviews was to limit my own part. Since I have worked with tourism for years and often very interesting issues came up, which I would have liked to discuss. When I spoke to, for instance, the fruits sellers at the beach, these “interviews” were more like informal chats or what Bernard (2006:211) would call informal interviews. Here I was chatting with them, while buying fruit (which I did every day). I had some questions prepared, so it was not completely informal, but these meet ups were never sit-down interviews and defined as semi-structural interviews.

Ngapali, being such a small tourism destination did not have any offices or any real municipality. Burma is still quite top-down in its decision-making and planning process so the people working directly with developing tourism were to be found in Yangon.

All in all I felt that the interviews went fine and I believe this had to do with the subject of research. Tourism in itself is not a sensitive issue in Burma today, quite the opposite. The international staff I interviewed had very much chosen to be in Burma to work in their area and for the locals I interviewed, especially in Ngapali, it was very interesting to see that they were quite empowered by their jobs in the tourism industry. The optimism that I observed in Burma was even more so present in the tourism industry, thus making my research area a very rewarding one.

The desk research I conducted before my fieldwork revealed that little anthropological research was conducted in Ngapali and on tourism in Burma. It is nonetheless important to establish previous research conducted on your topic according to Bernard (2006:199). Anthropologists such as Fink (2009) and Skidmore and Wilson (2012) touch upon tourism related issues in their research, but I was
unable to find much more leading me to conclude that this topic was an under-researched one. The tourism boom began in 2010 thus making the tourism sector fairly new and for obvious reasons not much research had been conducted. By conducting fieldwork in Ngapali I gained a deeper understanding of the challenges Rakhine Burmese experiences, which I am confident was connected to my presence in Ngapali.

There might be worse surroundings to conduct fieldwork in than in an area containing a beach, but the workload is nonetheless the same. Stronza (2001) comments that despite tourism’s association with things shallow and frivolous, tourism is relevant to both real-world and theoretical issues in anthropology.

2.2 Limitations
When I arrived in Yangon late January 2014 SIM cards for mobile phones were still very expensive, and difficult to get hold of. The prices had already dropped to around 200$ for a SIM card, compared to 500$ a couple of years before my stay. After trying to get hold of one for days at the black market I finally decided that it was a positive thing that I could save 200$ and I aimed to manage without one. Foreign SIM cards had no coverage in Burma at all. The difficulties of getting hold of SIM cards of course meant that I was not the only one without a SIM card and at that time Yangon had many “phone boots” which where a table outside someone’s house or office who had a landline, with the telephone cable stretched from somewhere inside the house to the actual phone, that where on the table outside in the street. This was how local people placed their phone calls. In addition one could always enter a restaurant or a shop and ask to use their phone. Not all places had one of course, but I quickly learned that it was common to just pop in and ask at a restaurant or shop. The landlines were though not always working, making it an uncertain option. Internet was though surprisingly widespread, at least in Yangon. Therefore I could email people, request and set up interviews.

The traffic situation in Yangon was quite extreme and I had not expect that all. It was traffic from early morning to late evening. Yangon is not such a big city but due to the traffic situation it felt huge. A five-kilometre drive easily took one hour, or more. The
traffic was also completely unpredictable so one never really knew the time it would take for each and every journey. A lack of sidewalks and streetlights made walking difficult, especially in the evening. Another challenge transportation wise was that the taxi drivers did not know where anything was. This was not that strange, hence before 2011 there were hardly any cars or tourists that used taxis in Yangon. The taxi drivers were fairly new at their jobs, which meant they did not know any addresses either. Way too late I learned that one should tell taxi drivers the name of the old bus stops, since they all had taken the bus prior to 2011. And since I had no mobile phone I could not call and say I was late or ask for directions when I was lost. I did spend a huge amount of time going from A to B to conduct interviews, and some times I did not actually get to the location at all. Then I had to go back home, email the informant and hope to set up an interview for the next day.

Logistically planning and traveling to the various venues to conduct interviews took up much more time than I had expected and thus became a limitation. This is time I would have liked to use preparing for interviews, conducting interviews and reading up on relevant material. I would have had time for more interviews if I had not been forced to use so much time stuck in traffic. The lack of a phone made setting up interviews a time consuming process, which also became a limitation. When emailing I had to wait for answers, and to find a date and time normally did involve several emails back and forth.

Homestays are still illegal in Burma so I had no choice but to stay at guesthouses. It was obvious to me already before I left for Burma that I would lack a very valuable entrance to the field and possible informants or contacts. It did force me to find my own informants and by doing that I did not have to worry about getting a too narrow selection of informants.

This thesis is limited it several ways. First of all, tourism is a huge subject and global phenomena and this thesis will only cover a small part of it. Many issues came up in Ngapali, several of them to my surprise, that I would have liked to research further. For instance the government’s use of hotel zones, sand mining and land grabbing are practices that deserve more research and attention.
Ngapali was a very expensive place to live, which became a limitation since I could not afford to stay there for the full ten weeks. This limited the number of people I could interview. I would have liked to interview more members of the local population, especially the fishermen. I believe there is a lot more to say about their situation. I would also have liked to interview members of the Rohingya minority to ask them directly about their job opportunities in Ngapali as to gain their perspectives. Finally it was indicated to me that it was difficult for female staff to gain access to management positions at the hotels. Due to time constraints I was unfortunately not able to research this issue further.

2.3 Reflexivity

“Reflexivity, broadly defined, means a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference. In the context of social research, reflexivity at its most immediately obvious level refers to the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research” Charlotte Aull Davies (2008:4)

At the time of my research I had worked in the tourism sector for ten years. Because of that I had my own experiences, and my own idea and knowledge of tourism. I put a lot of thought into this before I decided that I wanted to do research on tourism. I especially thought about if I should tell people I worked in the tourism sector. Most of the times I ended up telling the people I interviewed that I worked in the sector myself, and I got only positive feedback on this. I also think it helped them feel more relaxed with me and there were many issues they did not have to explain to me, making the interviews run very smoothly. I strongly believe that the knowledge I had from the tourism sector was of great help to me. Numerous small or large issues I just knew by experience, and therefore understood my informants much better. On the other side I also had my biases, and my opinions about tourism and development. This was part of why I chose Burma to begin with; the context and the country would at least be completely new to me. My biggest bias was that prior to my research I believed that tourism could benefit local communities. At the same time this was not something I had decided very firmly upon, it was more of a notion I had, so I did not
conduct my research with a firm belief that tourism would lead to development in all local communities. Because of my known bias I reflected much upon the negative impacts from tourism.

The company I previously worked for (Fritidsresor AB/TUI, a Swedish tour operator) did have trips to Ngapali and Burma in 2013 and 2014, and I interviewed one of their guides working in Ngapali. The work connection provided me with an exclusive access to this guide. But as my thesis is based on a broader perspective about job opportunities in the tourism sector, and Fritidsresor did not control this in Ngapali, I felt confident that my employment with them did not affect my research. At the time of my study, Fritidsresor utilized a very low number of rooms at two of the nineteen hotels in Ngapali, and employed none of the workers in the tourism sector (the guide previously mentioned had his employment in Sweden and did move around between the different Fritidsresor’s destinations depending on the seasons). In addition I later had a six-month internship with a Swedish NGO called ‘Schyst Resande’ (Fair Travel) and as they appear later in this thesis I will clarify my involvement with them. My tasks during the internship consisted of various administration tasks, preparation for seminar and research on sustainable tourism.

2.4 Returning to the field
Four months after I left the field I went back to conduct my internship at the Norwegian Embassy in Yangon, from August 2014 until February 2015. Already when I was conducting my fieldwork I decided I wanted to go back for an internship. I wanted to get to know the country in more aspects than tourism and development. I was very much curious to learn more about the political situation and the peace process. As I do not see tourism as an isolated issue but in connected to other parts of the society I felt it would be useful for me to gain a broader understanding of Burma and the situation in Rakhine. I were inspired by Frohlick (2007) who claims that ethnography has to move away from the localizing mode in order to understand the complexities of mobility. She did research on mountaineering in Nepal and states that this cannot be researched as an isolated event but that is has to be seen in correlation with the international travel adventure. Ngapali is located in Rakhine state, and after my fieldwork there I really felt I was lacking knowledge of the over-all situation in
the state and the country. When conducting interviews in Ngapali my focus was not the overall situation in Rakhine, but issues came up here and there. Especially when I learned of the different job opportunities for Muslims and Buddhists I decided it was important to learn more about the situation in Rakhine.

My internship at the Norwegian embassy lasted almost seven months. During this internship I worked closely with my Burmese colleagues at the embassy. After a few months my presence were completely natural to them. I realized that this was exactly what Hylland Eriksen (2000:25) meant when he stated that an anthropologist should stay in the field as long as it takes for the anthropologist’s presence to be perceived natural by the local population. I spoke with my colleagues effortlessly and I learned a great deal from them. I also got to know and meet many people connected to tourism, leaving me with some information that would have been good to know during my actual fieldwork, but nonetheless still filled some of my information gaps.

During my internship I met the minister of Tourism and got to observe him talking about tourism for foreign delegations. This was interesting, but as I will explain in more detail later, the Burmese government’s view on tourism development is very well known. In terms of usefulness these meetings were not that relevant to my research but nonetheless acted as supportive information.

I travelled back to Ngapali once during my internship and did some observations and some minor follow-up interviews. Unfortunately I only had a few days there for the visit, but just for observation purposes it was useful. The Burmese government in 2013 decided upon a new hotel zone in Ngapali, and the process of building new hotels had already started. During my actual fieldwork, the airport was very small, but a new departure hall was almost finalized when I was there in November 2014.
Chapter 3 – Background

In this chapter I will introduce Burma and more importantly introduce Burma as a tourism destination. I will also explain the turn of events in 2010 that made tourism develop rapidly. After much consideration and actual findings in my fieldwork I will end this chapter with a section on the Rohingya minority and their current situation.

3.1 Introducing Burma

Anthropologist Gravers (2014:143-148) has done research on Burma related topics since the 1970s. He explains the history of Burma; until 1948 Burma was a British colony and a part of the British Empire (as well as the East India Company). Aung San (the father of Aung San Suu Kyi) was a front figure in the Burmese independence movement and negotiated with the British prior to the independence in 1948. Assassinated in 1947 Aung San never got to experience independence, but more importantly his assassination and the following independence from Great Britain left a power vacuum that no one quite managed to fill, until the military and general Ne Win gradually filled it according to Gravers (ibid). The coup in 1962 was the beginning of the Ne Win years that lasted until 1988 according to Fink (2009:27-45).

Decades of suppression of the Burmese people followed, and although the people fought back the military government stood firm and allowed very little resistance, Fink states (2009:46-112) and mentions demonstrations in 2007 as well as student demonstrations in 1996. The student’s demonstration in 1988 and the following protests in 1989/90 were also periods when the people tried to fight back according to Fink (ibid.).

Gender-based violence and especially rape as a weapon have been widely used by the Burmese army according to Flint (2017:287). The army uses rape as weapon, as a tool to dominate ethnic minorities, and this is common in many other conflicts where the state and its army wish to illustrate its dominance comments Flint (ibid.). Rape as weapon creates a lasting fear, stigma and trauma according Fink (2009:147) who also confirms the use of rape by the Burmese army against various ethnic groups in Burma, including the Rohingya.
3.2 Burma as a tourism destination

Burma has a diverse tourism sector; from pristine beaches in the south, to snow capped mountains in the north, to the ancient temples of Bagan and the fascinating Inle Lake with its people living in floating villages. The country has a long coastline along the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. Ngapali area is located along this coast. Myeik, or Mergui, the Burmese archipelago consists of several hundred islands.

There are trips in this archipelago on boats (bigger yachts or sailboats) with full board as there is no way of getting supplies when sailing in this area. Unfortunately for Burma and the population in this area, the boats belong in Thailand and although they need to pay a fee to local authorities in Kawthoung, very little income from the business end up in Burma. Thai crew, and sometimes one or two local Burmese crew, man the boats, but as the Thai crew have sailed in these waters for years they do not really need a Burmese from the area. These trips came up in several conversations with my Burmese informants as they were all rather frustrated by this. They observed the tourism, but could not take part and benefit from it. Dancuse et al. (2009) explain that the Mergui archipelago is the home of the sea nomadic foragers group, Moken (also known by the name ‘sea gypsies’). They have traditionally lived off their boats engaging in maritime foraging. A sustainable tourism development approach should take into account that the archipelago is the home of this indigenous group.

The top five tourism destinations in Burma, according to my knowledge after spending almost a year in total in Burma, are spread around the country thus diversifying the income made from tourism. One also sees that tourists traveling to Burma choose to travel around and visit several destinations. After traveling around in the country many tourists travel to Ngapali for a few days of relaxation on the beach. There are a limited number of over-land boarders, so most tourists enter Burma by air. The top destinations are:

- Yangon
- Mandalay
- Bagan
- Inle Lake (and the wider inlay region)
- Ngapali
Yangon is the de-facto capital, and entry point to Burma for most tourists. The landmark and main tourist attraction in Yangon is the Shwedagon Pagoda. Rising 100 metres above ground and covered in gold plates it is visible from large parts of the city. In Yangon one will find the country’s best range of hotels, restaurants and activities. The former capital shows signs of its colonial legacy with old British architecture. Century-old buildings with magnificent architecture, although many are crumbling because of lack of maintenance, are the main tourist attraction in downtown Yangon.

As of now tourism in Burma will restrict itself. The infrastructure in the country is of very low standard. Flying is the best and safest form of transportation and the most popular tourism destinations mentioned above are easily reached by air transportation. Outside the biggest tourism destinations the roads are in bad condition, and airports and flight schedules are more scare thus making these areas more difficult to reach. Several of my informants brought up the fact that homestays are still illegal in Burma and that guesthouses/hotels need to have permission to house foreigners. These regulations are still very much enforced. This means that travel outside the cities and tourism destinations need to be planned more carefully and that spontaneous travel can be difficult. In addition the rainy season in Burma make parts of the country inaccessible for four months per year. In Ngapali, the area of my fieldwork, hotels close during the rainy season from June to September every year.

It was after the semi-democratic election in 2010 that tourists started to visit Burma in large numbers. But Burma and its military junta government had for a long time tried to attract tourists. Fink (2009:263-264) explains how 1996 was proclaimed Visit Myanmar Year by the government. This was not a success as Aung San Suu Kyi asked tourists to boycott Burma and the tourists to a great extent listened. According to Khang at Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB) a lot of hospitality training was nonetheless done both by the government and international actors such as hotel chains that was hoping for an expansion to Burma. When Visit Myanmar Year largely failed, several of these hotels asked the now trained staff if they wanted to come and work abroad at their hotels, and according to Khang many did. This is also something I was able to confirm from many of my informants. They had
themselves worked abroad, or had staff at their hotel, which had come back to Burma with work experience from abroad. Approximately 4,000 tourist guides were trained for Visit Myanmar Year and today 400 work within the tourism industry as many of the other trained guides chose to pursue other possibilities according to Khang. In 2010 the country did not start from scratch with hospitality training and capacity building. They had already their previously trained workers and those who chose to come back from abroad have in my opinion been contributing to the Burma’s hospitality industry with valuable insights from tourism sectors abroad.

Finally, it is important to explain two other issues in Burma’s tourism industry: the cronies and land grabbing. A crony or a crony company is a person or a company who got rich or was formed because of connections to the former military junta, to put it simple, according to one of my informants working in an NGO that promotes sustainable tourism in the country. When I arrived in Burma I had never heard the word crony before, and I have never heard it outside Burma either, but the word is widely used inside Burma, both by the people and in the media. Outside Burma the word, business tycoon, can be used but in my opinion that word does not completely cover the meaning of the word crony. These cronies may be former military junta members, family members of these or people with some kind of link to the former military junta. These links made them, amongst other, secure land and business deals. The same informant also explained to me how hotels have been and are today, being built on stolen land. Liberalisation of the economy as we see now in Burma is therefore still benefitting these cronies and the elite class. Vicky at the MCRB confirms this, and states that unclear land rights are a general problem in Burma, in all sectors.

3.3 Burma after 2010
The semi-democratic elections in 2010 started a new era in Burma. The election was neither free or open which led the National League for Democracy (NLD) to boycott the election, but it did end the one-party system that had existed for four decades. A week after the election Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest along with 112 other political prisoners. Many more political prisoners were not released before much later, making the new era a very slow one. The “new” government led under
former general Thein Sein made several policy changes. Among them were an ease of the censorship laws, starting reconciliation processes and in general he made an effort in establishing some form of participation in various public policy debates (Skidmore and Wilson:2012).

The military still play an important part in Burmese politics since they before the election had the constitution amended. Lidauer (2014) explains that the Burmese military made sure Aung San Suu Kyi never could be president by stating that person married to a foreigner can not take office and they made sure the military would have 25 % of the seats in parliament. The military also made sure that in order to amend the constitution it would take 75% and above of the votes thus leading the military to have veto power according to Lidauer (ibid.). In the by-elections in 2012 NLD agreed to withdraw their boycott and took part in the election. Of the 45 seats that had been vacant and thus able to compete about, the NLD won 43 seats and Aung San Suu Kyi finally became a member of parliament according to Lidauer (ibid.).

3.4 The Rohingya minority
The Muslim Rohingya group has traditionally lived in northern Rakhine (formerly Arkan) state according to Fink (2009:240). A Tatmadaw (the name of the Burmese military) operation in 1978 drove 200,000 Rohingya into Bangladesh and in a Tatmadaw organized forced-relocation programme in 1991, 250,000 Rohingya were forced across the boarder to Bangladesh states Fink (2009:241). Amnesty International (2017) states in their report, “Caged without a roof”, that the situation for the Rohingya had declined further after the Burmese army unleashed a brutal campaign against the Rohingya minority in Rakhine in august 2017. According to the same report over 600.000 Rohingya have fled into the neighbouring country Bangladesh, just in 2017. The refugees have shared accounts of a brutal Burmese military, killing, raping, torturing and burning down entire villages. This brutal campaign launched by the Burmese military came after a small-armed group called the Arkan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) coordinated attacks on Burmese security posts. Instead of investigate and bring the assailants to justice the Burmese army chose to target the entire Rohingya population according to Amnesty International (ibid).
Fink (2009:241) explains how the Rohingya are denied citizenship and that they cannot travel even to another village without permission, which severely limit their ability to study, work and to receive healthcare. Furthermore malnutrition is extremely high due to the fact that food can’t be moved between villages without permission. After clashes between Muslims and Buddhists in 2012 theses laws and regulations have been reinforced more strongly according to Amnesty International (2017). The clashes in 2012 were labelled inter-communal violence by the Burmese government or lately as terrorist threats but according to Amnesty International (ibid.) the government used these clashed to separate and segregate the Rohingya. With permission and in emergencies they may be allowed to seek medical treatment at Sittwe general hospital but they are then kept in separated wards according to Amnesty International (ibid.). As Fink (ibid.) states all these practices are in place with the purpose to drive the Rohingya out of Burma permanently. Amnesty International (ibid.) has labelled this situation as apartheid.

Unfortunately amongst the Buddhist majority population there is very little sympathy for the fate of the Rohingya. I myself observed this on numerous occasions, both in conversations with people and when reading local news media, both in Burma and after I returned home. It should be mentioned that the word Rohingya is barley used in Burma, instead they are often called Bengalis. Aung San Suu Kyi herself asked the diplomatic community in Yangon to refrain from using the name Rohingya and instead use ”Muslims living in Rakhine state” according to Amnesty International (2017). This anti-Muslim sentiment is pointed out by Prasse-Freeman (2017) and he states that Buddhist monks and opportunists political entrepreneurs are associating the Rohingya with jihadist movements to install a fear of an imminent Islamification.

Fink (2009:241) also points out the lack of sympathy for the Rohingya minority suffering from the Buddhist Rakhine population and Burmese general population. The military junta was successful in playing different ethnic groups up against each other and even though many groups understood the importance of acting together against the military rule they nonetheless fell victim of their own prejudice and fears according to Fink (ibid.)
Chapter 4 – Theoretical framework
In this chapter I will define sustainable development and sustainable tourism before I discuss these concepts as to see if they are mutual reinforcing or mutual exclusive. I will also give an overview of the different forms sustainable tourism practices, as to establish if certain tourism practice may be better in terms of poverty alleviation.

4.1 Sustainable development
Sustainable development is a phrase widely known by now. Numerous NGOs, states, educational institutions and businesses use this phrase. It was the report “Our Common Future, From One Earth to One World”, or more commonly known by the name “the Brundtland report”, released by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED:1987) that coined the most used definition of the concept sustainable development. The report received its name from the then Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland and chair of the commission, and defined sustainable development as:

“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED:43).

The report also highlighted the three components of sustainable development; social, economic and environmental and how they interact with each other, and that all three components are needed to reach sustainable development (WCED:1987).

Elliott (2006:256) states that we have learned that a necessary condition for sustainable development and poverty alleviation is empowerment and participation of local communities. Too often in the past according to Elliott (ibid.) development processes have led to undermining local communities’ control over resources they have been depended on, thus leading to insecure livelihood and environmental degradation. Elliott (2006:120-121) mentions the structural adjustments programmes (SAPs) poplar in the 80s and 90s, as development programs only preoccupied with the economic part of development, and not environmental or social issues, which did not lead to any sustainable development. Elliott (2006:260) states that there are no blueprints for sustainable development, but successful sustainable development
projects have proven synergies drawn from prioritising local knowledge and needs in programs focusing both on improving the environment and the local community.

According to Elliott (2006:42) sustainable development is central to the international agenda and it is a central policy goal for most institutions, however how to bring about sustainable development is still very much contested.

4.2 Sustainable tourism

UNWTO (2005) defines sustainable tourism as:

“Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”.

In addition, the UNWTO (ibid.) emphasize the importance of participation from all relevant stakeholders when sustainable tourism is developed. There are many different forms of sustainable tourism with a varying focus. Here I will list and discuss the various ones, such as ecotourism, heritage tourism, community-based tourism and pro-poor tourism.

According to Butcher (2003:121) community-based tourism is considered the most ethical tourism today and Butcher (ibid.) states it is the British campaign group Tourism Concern¹ that have fronted this type of tourism. They define community-based tourism as tourism that “involves genuine community participation and benefits” and that put people first, rather than environment first. They further argue that it is only by putting people first, that true conservation solutions can be found. Butcher (ibid.) finds this revealing as conservation is the aim but local communities must be involved for this to happen. Community-based tourism emphases local democracy and the involvement of local communities in decision-making. For this to work though, there must be different options people can choose freely from and Butcher (2003:122) points out how in poor rural communities where community-based tourism is advocated, these different choices do not exists and the agendas are

¹See tourism concern’s webpage for more information: https://www.tourismconcern.org.uk/
set by the ones who offer investments and aid. According to Butcher (2003:122) community-based tourism has been widely accepted by numerous NGOs, governmental aid organisations and campaigns.

According to Stronza (2005) a stakeholder analysis is very important when community-based tourism projects are planned, due to the fact that participation is one of the cornerstones in projects like these. A community with its various members have more often than not very different opinions and views of a community-based tourism project. And they may change their opinions countless times. Men, women, old, young and/or indigenous people may perceive, and would want to engage in a tourism project very differently. Another finding Stronza (ibid.) points out is how conflicts inside the community may be intensified when people outside the community (although sincerely) want to help the community thus leading outside stakeholders to take side in community conflicts. When projects are launched, internal competition is normal according to Stronza (ibid.), as now community members are wondering who earn the most money, if anyone is having any advantages and who are participating and who are not.

Ecotourism is a concept with many possible definitions, but generally these revolve around the idea of travelling in a way that have minimum impact on the environment, whilst at the same time enjoying different features of the natural environment according to West and Carrier (2004). In addition ecotourism often include a sociocultural element such as an experience and interaction with a local population (often a indigenous group) together with customs and traditions that may seem exotic, but in a way that benefit and respect the indigenous group, add West and Carrier (ibid.). In short travellers that act in a responsible and respectable way both towards the environment and local population. Eco tourists normally pay entrance fees to national parks and reserves, which help to support these and ecotourism also encourage eco tourists to gain knowledge of and support their host groups according to West and Carrier (ibid.).

Wallace and Diamente (2005) state that conservation, ecotourism and economics may be related but even if they are related they do not always go so well together. It is
therefore important that ecotourism projects take into account the need of the people of the local community and not only environmental and conservation issues. In addition it is important to involve the community in decision-making and to provide job training for individuals who wish to work within the tourism projects.

Mason (2005) has been involved with heritage tourism development as an consultant and explains heritage tourism as tourism that preserve heritage resources while at the same time avoid marginalization, benefit the local economy and serve the community member needs. To establish heritage tourism, resources in the community must be transformed into economically beneficial tourist attractions but at the same time keep the heritage of the community. In addition Mason (ibid.) states that it is important that the community have expressed a desire to develop tourism and community pride. Mason (ibid.) finally mentions that the role of anthropologists in tourism planning: anthropologists may be of great use within tourism planning (especially in heritage tourism), as they demand the perspectives and facilitation of various interest groups.

Pro-poor tourism recognise that poverty is multi dimensional and it is extend beyond income-generation as to include a wide range of livelihood impacts from tourism according to Chok, Macbeth and Waren (2007). Butcher (2003:128) mentions pro-poor tourism and that one of the arguments for utilising tourism in this way is that tourism products such as culture and natural resources is the only important assets poor people have. It is this lack of resources that defines their underdeveloped status. The pro-poor tourism works around this lack of resources to provide a somewhat limited development in rural areas and according to Butcher (ibid.) this view on development can hardly be celebrated, quite the opposite as it reflects a rather low view of what development is. The pro-poor tourism is discussed in terms of what is beneficial for the poor and the economic benefits are considered the most important ones but social, cultural, environmental benefits also needs to be taken into account. Pro-poor tourism see itself as a broader approach of tourism than for example community-based tourism as pro-poor tourism tries to establish links between poor communities and the formal sector states Butcher (ibid).
All the various forms of sustainable tourism underline the importance of participation from local communities. Stronza (2005) points out an interesting factor in this, namely how normal it is that participation has different meaning to all involved parties. Her research on a community-based eco tourism project in the Peruvian Amazonas showed that the community, the company involved in the tourism project and herself defined participation completely different. In addition, to get people to participate sometimes involved a strategy somewhere between informing and persuading. Stronza (ibid.) noted that this community-based tourism project was actually the first time local population were asked to participate thus making the idea of participating new and quite confusing. It is important according to Stronza (ibid.) to cover the question on who is to participate, but also how to participate.

‘Schyst Resande’ (2018), a Swedish network of different organisations, promotes sustainable tourism through a holistic approach. The network focus is on various aspects of sustainable tourism such as climate change and water rights, prostitution in the tourism sector, alcohol and tourism, worker’s unions and local economic development. The network, as many others, recognises that tourism can be a tool for development in many countries, but they emphasize that this require the travel industry to take on a greater responsibility for sustainable travel. Social, economic, ethical and environmental aspects must gain more focus from the travel industry in order for sustainable travelling to become more widespread according to the network Schyst Resande (ibid.).

Tourism and sustainable tourism is too often seen as a panacea, a social, economic and environmental cure-all according to Chok, Macbeth and Waren (2007). If structural inequalities are not addressed, focusing on tourism, as a tool for development is unlikely to bring about any real achievements or betterment of livelihoods for marginalized population, states Chok, Macbeth and Waren (ibid.), much like other forms development.

There are several organisations working in Burma supporting ecotourism initiatives. Partnership for Change², Fauna and Flora³, Hanns Seidel Foundation⁴, Tourism

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² see http://pfchange.org/inlespeaks/?lang=en
Transparency⁵ and Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business⁶ have among other things contributed with policy documents, stakeholder analysis, workshops in local communities and general research on tourism and how it can be developed in a more sustainable form. They all seem to experience, according to my interviews with people working to promote sustainable tourism or ecotourism in Burma, difficulties to gain the government’s attention on these issues. They also share the fact that they normally work with conservation projects and civil society participation but they identified a need and a possibility to influence tourism initiatives.

There is no doubt that all these forms of sustainable tourism initiatives are planned and most often conducted much more sustainable than conventional tourism. The focus on local communities, participation and empowerment of marginalized groups are exemplary and in my opinion very much needed to make tourism sustainable.

4.3 Mutual reinforcing or mutual exclusive?

Tourism in all forms, both conventional and sustainable tourism, is expecting to grow and have continuously continued to grow according to the UNWTO (2017). Although we see (if marginal by comparison) a much bigger interest in sustainable tourism both by the tourists themselves and the travel industry, conventional travel are by far the most normal way of travel. In fact statistics from UNTWO (2017) shows that only 2% of international tourists chose to travel by train, while most tourists chose air travel (55%) or road transport (39%).

³ see https://www.fauna-flora.org/countries/myanmar
⁴ see https://southeastasia.hss.de/myanmar/our-office/
⁵ see http://www.tourismtransparency.org/
⁶ see http://www.myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org/index.php
Gössling et al. (2012) points out how many people, when travelling, in fact use more resources than when they are at home. Tourists eat and drink more, they indulge in certain luxuries they would not indulge in at home, such as spas, swimming pools, golfing, longer showers, in short the consumer pattern change. Perhaps not all surprising as we all like to enjoy ourselves when travelling, especially on holiday.

The issue of water is important to discuss when it comes to tourism and especially sustainable tourism. Gössling et al. (2012) state that often tourists will arrive during the dry season when there is very little rain and water availability is restricted. Accommodation will have a high water use for showers, toilets, laundry, kitchen use, swimming pools, irrigation in gardens and so on. Gössling et al. (ibid.) state that there is a large difference between a five star resort and a small guesthouse in terms of water use. In addition huge amount of sewage and wastewater are generated by the tourism industry and may be discharged directly into the sea, or discharged with unsatisfactory treatment. This unsatisfactory treatment may also contribute to a pollution of the environmental assets tourism is depending on, namely the beaches and the ocean. In addition the pollution of oceans and/or beaches may have grave consequences for local populations depended on the ocean for fishing explain Gössling et al. (ibid.).

Globally indirect water use in the tourism sector may become more relevant according to Gössling et al. (ibid.). This includes water that is used to provide the services of the accommodation establishment, including the construction of the hotel and energy use for food and beverage consumption. Construction accounts for 17% of global water use. Concrete is the second most consumed material in the world and the use of concrete is in itself water consuming. In addition to hotels, other construction such as airports, roads, ports, events, museums and restaurants also accounts for a lot of water use. Fuel and electricity production and distribution is water intensive.

To provide a more nuanced picture I would like to add that according to Gössling et al. (ibid.) tourism may also influence water quality in a positive way when contribution to improvements such as sewage treatment systems and systems to improve water quality are designed. This was for instance the case with Ngwe Saung
in Burma. Water and proper sanitation came with the tourism development in the beginning of 2000s. Before this the population of Ngwe Saung belonged to the country’s 20% rural population that practiced open defecation, and suffered serious health conditions as a result according to Pritchard (2013). Later in the thesis, I will show how Ngapali also benefitted from tourism in terms of better sanitation.

“Rapacious development from tourism developers and hedonistic tourists with no regards for their hosts, is generally the last of the problems facing Third World countries seeking to better themselves. Rather, it is the partial and limited nature of development that can produce tensions. From this perspective it is at least as true to argue that the problem is not too much development, but too little, and perhaps not too many tourists, but too few”. Jim Butcher (2003:61)

Butcher (2003:131) states it is important to understand the benefits with small-scale tourism such as community-based tourism and ecotourism while at the same time understand that, since it is in fact small scale by the very nature of it, the impact for local communities is often small as well. Small, personal and locally owned businesses are the cornerstones in this type of tourism, which is important when weighing in the environmental factor in tourism. It is argued that these types of tourism is more beneficial for local population since it is based within local communities and will therefore use locally owned businesses such as accommodation, food, crafts and so on. Needless to say, states Butcher (2002:132) large international hotels chains have stakeholders to worry about, they may pay local staff less, they may not buy locally produced food and beverage items as they prefer to have a standardized concept. But large hotels do enable large amounts of tourists to visit and the potential to generate foreign exchange is much bigger. The failure of tourism is that it fails to team up with local suppliers and instead continue to import foreign produced food and beverage items into hotels and tourist destination.

Mass tourism according to Butcher (2003:133) is no panacea, but as an industry like any other industry, it can improve the livelihoods of people where it is located and bring economic development. Butcher (ibid.) explains that for the New Moral Tourist
as he calls them, all-inclusive hotels/tourism is the worst and the least form of ethical tourism there is. This tourism is large scale, focuses on the comfort of guests and not environmental issues. But since it is large scale it attracts large numbers of tourists and become a huge job provider. Eco tourism can according to Butcher (ibid.) not provide anywhere near this amount of jobs or foreign exchange.

Butcher (2003:6-7) states that mass tourism and the rapid growth of tourism is now an issue that it discussed as harmful to the environment and culture thus more often than not tourism is seen as a destructive force. Butcher (ibid.) sees two mutually reinforcing notions when it comes to what he calls the moralisation of tourism. One, mass tourism is seen as bad for environment and for culture that are exposed to it. Two, this new ethical tourism is deemed good for the tourists too. More enlightening, it encourages respect for other cultures and it provides the tourist with a critical reflection of its own society. Academics and the tourism industry have several different names for this new moral tourism according to Butcher (ibid.) such as ethical tourism, alternative tourism, responsible tourism and/or ecotourism.

Nawijn et al. (2008) state that for developing countries to attract tourists from richer countries tourists has to travel to developing countries and that would most often be travel by air. Nawijn et al. (ibid.) call this west-south tourism, and this tourism mostly includes flying and by that large greenhouse gas emissions. In addition they state that a reduction in poverty levels therefore may lead to an increase in the human contribution to climate change. They further state that a reduction in poverty levels should not be made by ignoring the cost of climate change.

Nawijn et al. (ibid.) also point to what they call the culture effects of this west-south tourism. In general they claim, western tourists enjoy relaxing, beautiful surroundings, warm climates, nice food and visiting new places during their holiday. Preserving local culture is not on the list. But what may be found on the list are bad food, basic accommodation, lack of hygiene and pushy locals, and all these may be found in a developing country. Most tourists do not take many measures to preserve local culture, and tourists may deem many local practises unethical. Adjustments to attract tourists may then have to origin from the local communities and not the tourists themselves. It is the local communities that need to adapt part of its culture to
the western culture. Tourists have many destinations to choose from, but local communities can only choose from attracting tourists or not, states Nawijn et al. (ibid.). Lastly they recommend the UNWTO that if they want tourism to work as a tool for poverty reduction and at the same time be sustainable, to persuade developing countries to try and attract tourists from neighbouring countries and/or domestic tourists. Nawijn et al. (ibid) argues that sustainable tourism that also lead to poverty reduction must be found in south-south tourism.

In my opinion it is clear that these new and alternative forms of tourism is much less harmful for the environment and affect local communities less than mass tourism as they are small-scale. In an interview I conducted with Greg from Fauna and Flora he told me that their new ecotourism project in Indawgyi had 60 visitors last year (2013) and this year they were aiming for 100 visitors. This had minimal environmental consequences for the local community but at the same time there were very little revenue to be made for the local community from tourism. Just to exemplify how fragile the tourism sector in Burma is, I must mention that I learned that the area west of Indawgyi is closed off for tourists because of on-going fighting from Kachin independence army and Burmese military, in addition to illegal gold mining in the same area.
Chapter 5 – Diverse Ngapali

In this chapter I will introduce Ngapali, the site of my fieldwork. I will also describe my findings; the severe conflicts that at the time (winter 2014) were just below the surface. This affected my fieldwork because I felt I could not overlook them in my thesis. I went back to Burma and Ngapali in the fall of 2014, in 2015 (twice) and in 2016 and these conflicts were still very present, unfortunately.

5.1 Description of Ngapali

Ngapali is a small costal community located by the Bay of Bengal, approximately 45 minutes by air or 24 hours by bus from Yangon, and it is Burma’s finest beach destination. White sand, swaying palms, fresh fruit, cocktails and not too many tourists; Ngapali is a small and pleasant beach destination. The hotels are located along the beach; none of them more than three floors tall, making them blend perfectly into the vegetation. At the beach there are several small and simple restaurants serving Rakhine seafood dishes. Women are selling fresh fruit during the day, one can sunbathe or choose to go on a boat trip for snorkelling and sightseeing, in short it is a small and unspoiled piece of paradise according to the hotels. The first hotel opened in Ngapali for the winter season 1992/93 as the country was planning for Visit Myanmar Year in 1996. This was a government owned hotel, and a few other hotels opened during the 1990s and 2000s before building and development of hotels took off after 2010.
A new road was finalized in Ngapali before the rainy season started in May 2015. This main road in Ngapali runs from Thandwe airport, along the three stretches of beach, and ends just before the entrance to the fishermen’s village Gyeiktaw. The road was built to serve tourists with a better access to the hotels but the local community are also benefiting from this road. The old road was a dusty, half concrete/half dirt road difficult driving even a motorbike on, especially during the rainy season. I was told that the hotels waited for a long time before they actually decided to finance the road in cooperation with local authorities. The hotels have also partly financed the garbage collection in Ngapali, both the trucks and the workers. The local authorities lack resources both in terms of financial and qualified staff, thus leading to poor management of this area according to most people I both spoke to and interviewed. Hans, local staff at the NGO working with sustainable tourism, was especially preoccupied with this as he stated that construction of a new road and the garbage collection must be the responsibility of local authorities. A solution could be to tax the hotels, for instance 1$ per guest per night.

Mainly tourists that have travelled around in Burma and want to end their trip with a few days on a beach, visit Ngapali. Yangon, Bagan, Mandalay and Inle Lake are prioritized before Ngapali and see a considerably larger number of tourists. Ngapali is not very well known outside Burma which means that extremely few tourists choose to visit only Ngapali. In addition the airport in Thandwe is a domestic airport thus forcing tourists to travel via Yangon, even if they only want a beach vacation in Burma. The second group of tourists going to Ngapali are the expats and members of the diplomatic community living and working in Burma, many of them based in Yangon. Ngapali is expensive for expats on a local contract, but on the other hand they are more flexible and can look for special promotion deals towards the end of the season, or on special days. One of Burma’s low cost airlines recently started flying to Ngapali making the beach even more accessible and cheaper to reach. The third group of tourists in Ngapali is the increasingly larger Burmese middle class who now finally can afford to travel. During my visits to Ngapali I observed more and more Burmese tourists there, both families and groups of friends.
There are two types of hotels in Ngapali, the somewhat simpler guesthouses and the more elegant four-star hotels. There were in fact an equal number of guesthouses and more elegant hotels, although the prices were for both types of accommodation rather high, compared to other beach destinations in Asia. This was the case for accommodation in the rest of Burma as well. A room at a guesthouse in Ngapali was around 80$ per night and at the more elegant hotels around 200$ per night. Ngapali gives a low-key impression and there seems to be an agreement to keep it that way. I often observed the fishermen (and their wives) selling the catch of the day to the hotels, guesthouses and the beach restaurants. The somewhat isolation of Ngapali and the fact that the hotels did source many items only locally did lead to a limited selection, especially compared to neighbouring Thailand. Not at all a problem for tourists and expats escaping Yangon for a weekend, but an interesting observation which made me admire the efforts made by staff at the hotels and restaurants.

5.2 Regional conflict
In one of my first interviews in Ngapali, with Sara an assisting manager, she told me how the Buddhist Burmese population in Ngapali and Thandwe area mark their houses with a Buddhist flag so they are safe from the radical mobs that burn down Muslim houses. A Buddhist flag outside a house in Rakhine state meant “Buddhist household, do not burn”. I knew that the situation in Rakhine state was rather serious but I was surprised when I realized this was also very much the case in Ngapali. Sara also said what I kept hearing in Burma, and actually noticed myself on several occasions, namely that the Burmese Buddhist majority population really disliked Muslims and especially the Rohingya.
Jay, staff at one of the more elegant hotels, explained the situation in Rakhine to me. Although he was not originally from Rakhine state, he had lived there for many years working at one of the hotels in Ngapali. In his view it were two main reasons for the discrimination of the Rohingya. The first one was poverty. Rakhine state is the second poorest state in Burma after Chin state. People starve in Rakhine, especially during rainy season when there is little work. There are few resources available both to Rakhine Buddhists and Rakhine Muslims thus leading to conflicts over the few available resources there is. Food, education and healthcare were all sectors the government should prioritize according to Jay. There are simply not enough opportunities in this state to escape the poverty. The second reason was the complete lack of understanding of the Rohingya’s situation, which Jay blamed the poor education system for, as well as the government who must take on responsibility for educational institutions. Schools must teach understanding stated Jay. It is vital that people, both Rohingya Burmese and Buddhist Burmese, learn about the differences amongst them but also that they in fact are rather alike. The quality of schools in Rakhine are abysmal, there are too few teachers, they are not always paid and some teachers do not actually manage to travel to the schools they are supposed to teach at

*Buddhist flags outside houses meaning “do not burn”*
because it is too far away or too expensive to travel there. There are also teachers that take the salary but do not show up to teach because they do not want to, or are just too lazy said Jay. There is unfortunately no control at the schools by the government or the local municipality so they do not know if the teachers are there or not. There are as well many teachers who are afraid of running into problems with the government or the student’s parents; therefore they pass all students at their exams.

In the end, Jay stated that, if people had enough food and a decent education, the structural discrimination the Rohingya had fallen victim to, would not have happened. Lastly Jay added that poor governance also is an important factor. When violence occurs, or mass rape, or burning of houses the government do not take action, or if they do it is done in a very slow manner. The legal system should also be fair without the involvement of the government. The lack of resources in Rakhine, is naturally affecting law enforcement and the level of corruption stated Jay. He did paint a rather hopeless picture of the situation, but at the same time he was convinced that it was possible to teach the population in Rakhine understanding, but that they needed more resources to do so.

Even if nearby areas experienced violence and burning of houses in 2012 and 2013, no violence did take place in Ngapali and as far as I know the number of visiting tourists were not affected. A curfew was imposed in Ngapali after these outbursts of violence, but several of my informants working at the hotels said they chose not to inform their guests about this. They claimed that since the tourists do not normally venture especially far after nightfall it would be no point to tell them about the curfew since they believed it would only lead to unnecessary worrying. Perhaps a valid point since they were absolutely right in the fact that tourists did not go very far after nightfall as there was not much to do in the area, but this could also lead to, in my opinion, an underestimation of the over all situation in Rakhine. The Burmese government’s treatment of the Rohingya has been met with silence for way too long.

The burning of Muslim’s houses in Thandwe and the imposed curfew had consequences for the hotels, as their staff could not move freely around. Sara told me that they had to change the work schedule so the morning staff could manage to get
home by 4pm. The afternoon staff had to stay the night at the hotel, as it was impossible for them to travel back home to Thandwe. Sara said that they managed to negotiate an exception for the staff living in Ngapali area. They were driven home by the hotel’s shuttle bus. In the nearby town Thandwe the curfew was in place much longer than in Ngapali. One informant told me that they did not inform their guests about the curfew in nearby Thandwe as “no one goes there in the evening anyway”. In my experience this is true, there is nothing really to do there, especially in the evening/night-time. The tourists who choose to visit Thandwe normally go in the daytime to visit the market there and/or to wander around the town.

5.3 Local conflict

The population in Ngapali has traditionally worked with fishing and farming before the tourists started to arrive. The fishermen and their wives in Ngapali area have therefore traditionally used the pristine beach for the drying of their fish. This was easy and practical as they could sort the fish, clean it and dry it the beach straight after coming on shore with their boats. The smell of drying fish is not something the hotels appreciate thus this has led to a severe conflict between the fishermen and the hotels, while the local government tries to mediate.

In addition to the actual smell, the fish is also occupying space at the beach that could have been use for sunbeds and activities, and as one informant stated “bikinis and fish don’t match”. Su, an English teacher at the hospitality school told me that from the winter of 2014 it had become illegal for the fishermen to dry their fish on the beach. The local government allotted the fishermen a new area for drying the fish away from the beach, but to reach this area the fishermen needed to rent or invest in trucks as the local government did not contribute with means of transport. This was too expensive so the fishermen had no choice but to continue drying the fish on the beach. Su said that some hotels respected the fishermen and understood how difficult it was for them to transport the fish to the new allotted area, and that they would not force them to quit drying the fish on the beach. Other hotels, according to Su, would not be as forthcoming as they had guests informing them that they would stay at other hotels if the problem were not solved. To clarify, the smell of drying in fish in the sun is quite horrendous and I understand that this could be problematic for an area that focuses on
developing tourism. Nonetheless it is very unfortunate that not more is being done to accommodate the fishermen’s needs.

In Ngapali, the majority of men are still fishing as their main occupation. But there is an increasing number that have changed occupation and now instead work in the tourism sector. This is not just because of the problems they have to process their fish, but also because of severe over-fishing in the area. From my interviews it was difficult to understand if it would be possible to go back to this occupation in case the tourism for some reason would cease to exist or the number of tourists would decrease. I think it is safe to assume though, that it would be somewhat challenging. Depending on the remaining people with these skills left and their ability to teach the skills needed to exercise their occupation it could pose a real challenge. It is also difficult to predict if this conflict will affect tourism in Ngapali. The areas the
fishermen use to dry their fish is not surrounding the whole beach, but stretches of beach located in front on certain (perhaps unfortunate) hotels.

Traditional way of drying fish

The development of tourism in Ngapali was problematic for the fishermen in other aspects too. Previously it was not uncommon that they owned a little plot of land that they could cultivate during the rainy months when the sea was too rough, thus making fishing too dangerous. This little plot could at least partly sustain them during the rainy season and it also gave them a little income. Many of these plots of land were located on beachfront areas. When the tourism boom started in the 2000s investors (and cronies) tried to gain access to these beachfront areas, and they were successful. Su said that they had paid the fishermen a small sum of money but not anywhere near the properties’ real value. This sum of money had nonetheless felt like a huge amount
for the relatively poor fishermen and farmers. In addition many of these fishermen (and farmers) were illiterate and had very little knowledge about things like this, Su sighed, and stated that perhaps they would not have spent the money they earned by selling their land especially wisely. The last plot of land was sold years ago and none of the fishermen had any money left by now. These events also fuelled the conflicts between the fishermen and the hotels. They felt tricked and deceived about loosing their land and acted not as cooperative as they might have done if they had been able to keep their land and by that rely on greater resources.

The government or perhaps local government and/or private companies have also started sand mining in Ngapali. I chose to limit myself in this thesis regarding the issue of sand mining so I will not go into this in detail, but I believe it deserves to be mentioned as sand mining is without a doubt very un-sustainable. It is very unclear who is the responsible part for the sand mining in Ngapali. There are rumours of private companies, local government or even the government itself. As I am not able to verify this I will not go into much detail. The rainy season in Ngapali can be quite rough, I learned during my fieldwork, and the removal of huge amount of sand is making matters worse for the hotels as the walls they build (of sand) to protect and keep the ocean waves from reaching the actual hotels are destroyed.

In a memo from Vicky at the MCRB directed to the chief on the tourism development central committee, she states that regarding the issue of sand mining it may have a negative impact on Ngapali’s tourism sector, which is Ngapali’s main source of job revenue. Tourists come to Ngapali exclusively for white sand beaches and its unspoilt environment. This is very true as the area consists of this unspoiled beautiful beach, but nothing else. The memo continues to describe the revenue and the jobs for local Rakhine people the tourism sector have created. Another crucial point is the fact that since Ngapali usually is an extra add-on destination for tourists that have travelled around Burma and have some time left to spend on a pristine beach, it may be an alternative to not go at all. If this beach is ruined, or if the experience at the beach is spoiled by for instance polluting trucks stuck in the waves as it has been reported and/or workers, including child labour, digging wholes at the beach, this could damage the reputation of Ngapali and make tourists go to other places.
This last part from Vicky is of great importance. If Ngapali is spoiled or if its reputation somehow gets ruined, tourists will experience no shortage of beautiful beaches in this part of Asia. One just has to travel across the border into Thailand to find them. As I mentioned Ngapali is not the most accessible beach area in Asia either, so there are many equally beautiful beaches within reach if going to Ngapali no longer feels safe or pleasant. Because you need to fly to Ngapali and one can easily fly to for instance Bangkok instead.

When I spoke with hotel managers I learned that several of the hotels have certain guests that are revisiting Ngapali year after year, forming a special bond both with Ngapali as a destination and its population. Several hotels had guests that came and stayed two months every year and had done so for years. One GM told me that a German couple had “adopted” one of his receptionists and sent her money throughout the year and spent time with her during their stay. These are obviously guests a hotel would very much like to have, and I do believe they would try to come back if they felt safe enough. I met with many expats during my stays in Burma and I think it is safe to assume that they are not overly scared and afraid of new things. And since many are on local contracts and chose to work in Burma to experience the country they would still travel to Ngapali even if the conflict in the region intensifies, especially if they could travel there more cheaply than before.

5.4 Hotel zones

A hotel zone is an area designed for tourism where all hotels for foreigners are located. According to Khang, at the MCRB, the government has been afraid of tourism and tourists, especially the independent ones. But at the same time the government want the revenue that tourism can generate. A hotel zone is therefore an alternative that the government is satisfied with, and at the same time they hope this will be a satisfying solution for the tourists as well. Anna, my informant at a European embassy, states that Burma would like to control its tourism and that they have looked to Bhutan for inspiration as they would not like to become the new Thailand. Quality and not quantity is what the government would like, Anna states. The Myanmar government chose to re-name community based tourism to a more fitting name (for them), namely community involvement in tourism, which may be interpreted as the
Burmese government do not see the importance of local participation. The government’s use of hotel zones is a problematic way of planning tourism, since there is very little, or even no local participation in these processes. The Burmese government has simply decided the location of these hotel zones. Butcher (2003) and Stronza (2005) both stress the importance of local participation in sustainable tourism.

According to several of my informants the use of hotel zones is also problematic because it results in hotel zones containing expensive hotels that tourists do not want to stay at. In addition the clearing of the vegetation in these hotel zones are not beneficial to the environment since it is done without questioning the environmental consequences, according to Hans. Another reason for the use of hotel zones is the lack of infrastructure, according to the people I met with in Yangon and Inle Lake working...
in the tourism sector. It is simply easier to establish a hotel zone with infrastructure limited to that zone. Especially one local teacher I interviewed in Inle Lake was horrified by the use of hotel zones and pointed out how unsustainable it was. Unfortunately local population will not benefit from this infrastructure development such as Pritchard (2013) stated the population in Ngwe Saung did. The Burmese government’s use of tourism zones and/or hotel zones for international tourists is a praxis one hardly can label as sustainable.

Many tourists that choose to visit Burma seek an (THE) authentic experience. They do not seek this designed tourist version. The region is filled with less authentic places and cheaper places than Burma and Ngapali. The workers in Ngapali still uses traditional clothing (longyies for both men and women) and the women still use the traditional tanaka paint on their cheeks. At the same time this is still common in the whole of Burma, it is part of what makes Burma seem very authentic compared other countries in the region. The market in nearby Thandwe was also something that the hotels recommended the tourists to go and experience as it was considered very authentic. The same was the case for the fisherman village Gyeiktaw. This village was located at the end of the beach and was recommended to visit if one wanted to see a real Burmese village. The village was quite poor, with many of its residents living in bamboo huts. It was mainly fishermen and their families who lived in this village thus one could observe traditional way of processing fish, their fishing gear and boats. This quest for authentic experiences may be one reason for tourists still choosing to visit Burma and Ngapali, even if local and regional conflicts are imminent.
Chapter 6 – Job opportunities in Ngapali

“An ever increasing number of destinations worldwide have opened up to, and invested in tourism, turning tourism into a key driver of socio-economic progress through export revenues, the creation of jobs and enterprises, and infrastructure development” (UNWTO:2017).

According to UNWTO (2014) Burma has shown an almost explosion like surged in international tourism arrivals after the country opened up in 2010. In 2014 the country had seen a 52% increase in tourism arrivals compared to 2010. The surge of international tourists arrivals in Burma have continued according to UNWTO (2017) as the last numbers from 2015 showed 4.681.000 million internationals arrivals. It is worth noting however that as Burma had been fairly closed so the numbers of tourists visiting Burma in 2010 was as low as 300.000 and by 2013 it had increased 900.000 international tourist arrivals per year. An Informant told me in an interview that it was well known that the Burmese government were into the habit of inflating tourist arrival numbers as they counted “every one walking over the boarder with a sack of rice for day-trading at the market”. So these numbers should be read with some caution. Regardless of the exaggerate-happy Burmese government it is safe to assume that tourism in Burma have had, just like UNWTO (2014) stated, a surge in international tourist arrivals.

Job opportunities in the tourism sector are normally the first thing that comes to mind when tourism is discussed as a tool for development, both direct and indirect jobs. In addition family members may receive revenue from people employed in the tourism sector, making them benefit indirectly from tourism.

6.1 Job opportunities in the hotels in Ngapali

Different jobs in the hotel sector were identified. The staff employed at the hotels consisted of receptionists, housekeepers, food and beverage staff, engineers, gardeners and so on. There were nineteen hotels in Ngapali in the winter of 2014 when I conducted my fieldwork. In the following years about ten more hotels have opened up, but Ngapali is still a small tourism destination. I was not able to conduct
in-depth interviews with staff at all the hotels, but as the area was very limited in size I still felt I got a detailed understanding of the hotel sector in Ngapali. The tourism sector in Burma and in Ngapali has been subject to rapid growth, which meant that qualified staff was very popular and able to demand higher wages and/or other benefits. This led to a movement of staff as the hotels actually competed among themselves to hire qualified staff, thus the staff I interviewed often knew many things of other hotels as well. This was because themselves or their co-workers had previously worked at other hotels. I found this to be very positive as it meant that the staff at the hotels were quite empowered and could choose to seek a new employer if they wanted. I interviewed one of the GMs at a hotel that just lost their head chef to the hotel next door, because they offered him almost twice as much pay. A GM I interviewed in Yangon also confirmed this development. Staff that had worked at his hotel for 20 years could get an offer from other hotels and decide to leave the current job in exchange for a new (and better paid) one.

I learned very early on in my fieldwork that the hotels preferred to hire staff from the local communities around Ngapali and Thandwe area. This was not purely out of
kindness of course, but partly because staff from the local communities did not demand as high wages as the ones from, for instance, Yangon. In addition it was difficult for the hotels to actually find staff in Yangon or other parts of Burma willing to move to Ngapali for work. As I have mentioned before Ngapali is quite isolated and it takes 24 hours by bus from Yangon to reach it. To fly back and forth is too costly for the staff that may have come from Yangon. The hotels also needed to have staff rooms at the hotels or hire some kind of accommodation in Thandwe thus making recruitment of staff from other parts of Burma expensive.

After several interviews and many informal chats I was able to establish a kind of blueprint that seemed to be valid for most hotels. Eight out of nineteen hotels had a management from abroad. At these hotels three staff (GM, assistant GM and guest relation manager) were recruited from abroad, and this was mainly because the hotel itself had foreign management. But when one started to look at the number of staff from Yangon (or other parts of Burma) compared to the number of staff from Ngapali area they were quite the same at most of the nineteen hotels. Around 10% of the staff was recruited from other areas of Burma, while 90% of the staff was locally recruited. The 10% recruited from the rest of Burma mainly consisted of staff that had skills the hotels did not managed to find in Ngapali area. This could be the head chef at the hotel, the engineer (all hotels had to have one because of electricity shortages) and other management positions such as the GM. The hotel Sara was employed at had a total of 110 staff. Out of a total 110 staff, three people were a part of the management and were from abroad, and another three staff was recruited from Yangon. This seemed to be the normal set up for the more elegant hotels. When it came to the somewhat simpler guesthouses they almost exclusively recruited staff from Ngapali area, although even they could have a few positions at the hotel covered by staff from Yangon.

As the tourism in Ngapali is seasonal this obviously have a great impact on job opportunities as a tool for poverty alleviation. Four months per year hotels in Ngapali close completely as the rainy season is rough in this area and this affect the people who make their living from working at the hotels. In one of my first interviews there I noticed that the hotels also found this problematic. This was naturally because the
hotels had no income for four months but also because it was difficult to keep their staff over the period of rainy season. It was a time consuming process to recruit new staff after every rainy season. Therefore the hotels had a practice of half paid leave during these months. The staff received 50% of their pay and some hotels actually had a practice of paying 70%, during the rainy season when the hotels were closed. The hotels kept their staff with this agreement, but it also made sure the staff at the hotels could manage their economy through the rainy season. In my opinion this should inspire other destinations with seasonal tourism, as this led to security for the staff. For tourism to be sustainable the needs of its workers need to be met.

50% or even 70% of the pay may seem too little to be able to sustain oneself on. But the qualified staff at the hotels in Ngapali had managed to negotiate good wages for themselves, especially compared to other workers in Ngapali area. A few years back, staff employed at the hotels earned between 50$ and 75$, now skilled workers earned around 150$, while unskilled work paid around 100$, both are well above average in this region.

At the time being there was one eco lodge (hotel) in Ngapali. At my first visit to Ngapali I interviewed one staff member there and at my second stay in Ngapali I decided to stay there for a few nights to observe their eco friendly practices. I had got the impression that they were not as eco friendly as they claimed. The staff member I interviewed had worked at the eco lodge on and off since 2006, even in position as acting GM for a few winter seasons, so he was very knowledgeable about the hotel and the area in general. In the interview he claimed they were an eco lodge because of the social projects they did in the nearby villages, water and electricity savings, waste collection and because they only recruited staff from local communities around Ngapali. My suspicions about the eco lodge not being as eco friendly as he claimed was partly true. The lodge was quite run down and maintenance was needed, but they put it off pointing to the fact that they were an eco lodge. Water and electricity shortages were very common in Ngapali (and in Burma in general) so hotels needed to save when they could. As for the waste collection they worked rather tirelessly to inform local fishermen and the tourist police on how important this was, but at the same time their own lodge was not very well organised in term of waste collection.
They did recruit staff exclusively from the local communities around Ngapali but they employed only three people and relied on filling positions with day labours for the rest. The most problematic issue was in my opinion that this was one of the few hotels that did not pay the staff 50-70% of their wages during rainy season. They kept one or two of the three employees on for the rainy season as they did hospitality training, but the last person(s) and the day labours received nothing. I was told that the reason for this simply was because they could not afford it. This was very hard to believe as they rented out their 10 rooms for about 80$-120$ per night, only kept a minimum staff, spent very little on maintenance and had water and electricity available just a few hours per day.

I was very happy to observe that many women worked in the hotels. On the lower level positions I was told (and observed) equally as many women as men. It was difficult for me to observe the management positions, but I made sure to ask questions about this in my interviews. Although there were women in management positions in the different hotels, it was indicated to me that men held most management positions. Unfortunately I did not discover any policies or plans to actively recruit more women into management positions.

6.2 Other job opportunities in the tourism sector
At Ngapali beach there were several beach restaurants of various sizes, but all of simpler style. The airport grew in size every year and employed people for their coffee shop, check in counter and baggage handling. During daytime women selling fruits and women selling jewellery from permanent stands also made their daily earning from tourism. There were also independent boat owners who arranged daytrips along the coast. In addition Ngapali had a tourism police force and there was a lot of construction projects going on, such as hotel and road construction.

At beach there were two clusters of beach restaurants with about five restaurants in each cluster. Furthermore there were several restaurants on the road, set back from the beach. These restaurants were mainly family owned and employed only local people from the nearby villages. They also provided the area’s fishermen and farmers with an opportunity to sell there catch of the day and other products thus their income were
diversified. In addition many of these restaurants acted like small tour operators by advertising boat trips, small guided trips in the nearby villages and Thandwe, motorbikes for hiring (although it was illegal for foreigners to drive a motorbike in this area) and various forms of transport to the airport, Yangon and other places in Rakhine state. There were many restaurants in the area and they were not always full thus leading the restaurants to come up with other ideas for income. Myat, the owner of one of the restaurants, told me that this was very normal and usually the restaurants acted like a family enterprise. Perhaps the brother of the restaurant owner was a fisherman, his son a tour guide with his own boat and with a cousin who owned his own car wanting to earn some extra money.

At the beach restaurants they often sold the catch of the day in a curry or grilled with locally grown vegetables. All very simple and they did not have a lot of choices but the few dishes they had were very tasty and very well prepared. The restaurants bought their food items and various drinks from shops and the market in Thandwe, or from the fishermen and farmers that came directly to the restaurant. Myat told me that many families further diversified their income. He and his family had this restaurant but at the same time they had a small rubber plantation and a small teakwood plantation. He also confirmed that everything was closed during rainy season. Because of the bad weather during rainy season, he said, they were not always able to work at their plantation but that they took some rest those weeks.

The fruit sellers walked the beach from one end to the other during daytime. They were about ten women all selling the same fruits, bought at the local market in Thandwe. From my conversations with them I understood that most fruits were produced locally in Rakhine state. Occasionally they had a few imported fruit items such as mango from Thailand. I learned that the Burmese mango season was very short and to please the tourists they tried to get hold of Thai mango. I was very curious to learn how much they could earn per day and asked several of them this question so I could fully understand if this was a job that could sustain them. On a good day I was told they could earn as much as 20 000 kyat, while on a bad day it could be as little as 10 000 kyat (1000 kyat is equal to about 0,75-1$). There is of course a lot of uncertainty in a job like this, since they never knew how much they
were going to earn. The staff at the hotels knew they would get their wages even if the hotel was not fully booked, but the number of tourists really affected the fruit sellers’ earnings. On the other hand day wages may be as low as 3000 kyat when, or if, people work as day labours within farming, construction or the fishing sectors. As I have mentioned tourism is seasonal in Ngapali, four moths per year there are no hotels open because of the rainy season and therefore basically no tourists at all. During this period of time, the women selling fruit tried to get the various types of day jobs on offer around the area, but they were not always successful in achieving one. The women therefore knew that the money they earned by selling fruit to the tourists might have to sustain them through the rainy season as well.

The independent boat owners that arranged boat trips were former fishermen who changed their occupation from fishermen to “tour operators” and guides. There were about ten-fifteen boats available at the main beach offering four-hour trips in Ngapali bay area for 20 000 kyat (20$), or a little more if it were a larger group of tourists. The boats were normally staffed with three men, and the boat owner was the boss. If they managed to book two trips they could earn 40 000 kyat per day. I was told that they often worked together with family members on the boats, and although I was not able to confirm it, I suspect that the payment was not split completely equal between boat owner and the two other family members. Boat owners and their staff were in the same situation as the fruit sellers, they never knew how much they would earn per day and during rainy season they had no trips at all since there were no tourists there.

The boat driver, Aung, I managed to conduct an interview with, told me he never went out with his boat during rainy season to fish (even if that was his previous occupation). According to him it was way too dangerous. He preferred to find other day labour work such as construction work or maintenance work at the hotels. He was also paid about 3000 kyat for these various day jobs. This makes me conclude that this was the going rate for day jobs in Ngapali area. In a wider perspective this meant that if boat owners managed to book at least one boat trip per day, they would earn more than by doing the various types of day jobs.
On the four-hour boat trip the tourists were taken around to various snorkelling sites. Unfortunately these were of very poor quality and that surprised me, as I believed this area to be quite untouched. Since I was really puzzled by this I asked around and I learned that dynamite fishing was very common in these waters. Dynamite fishing provides the fishermen with a quick and easy fishing solution but it is of course very damaging to marine life. I was also told that unfortunately overfishing was a problem in the whole region. The boat owners also had a smart business set up with a restaurant on an island. It was not so much an island but more a small patch of sand really. The boats always stopped there on the four-hour trip so the tourists could buy drinks or have lunch, and just enjoy the small beach. The prices were a little higher than on Ngapali mainland but about 5$ for two beers is still reasonable and the few times I was at the small island there were always tourists there. The boat owners
received a little commission every time they took tourists there and all in all I was told this was a win-win concept.

Traditional fishermen still fished and they were able to sell their catch directly to the hotels and beach restaurants, and the same did the farmers with their products. One could therefore conclude that they were all very much involved in the tourism sector and would suffer if the tourists stopped coming to Ngapali. They would perhaps not suffer as much as the workers who depended on tourism as their only source of income, but they would nonetheless be affected. Ngapali is as mentioned quite isolated so what could be sourced nearby was often that, leading to income for fishermen and farmers, even if many of the hotels also had goods delivered from Yangon.
When travelling outside Ngapali to Thandwe and well past Thandwe one could observe how big the fishing industry was in this area. There was a processing factory for fish, there were trucks going to Yangon with dried fish and fresh fish were flown to Yangon every day. The wives of the fishermen often dried the fish on patches here and there in the whole area. In addition one could observe different farming activities, such as rubber and teakwood plantations, various fruit and vegetables gardens and everywhere I went I observed large patches of dried chillies in the sun. There were also large fields were rice was grown outside Thandwe. Lastly, much of these products and especially the fish were sold at Thandwe market, which was a bustling market place for the whole area.

6.3 Job opportunities in Ngapali for Rohingya

A very problematic issue, I discovered in Ngapali was the situation for the (few) Rohingya employed at the hotels. I was curious to look into the opportunities for the Rohingya in the tourism sector in Ngapali. The foreign staff working (often as GMs) was taken by surprise when they learned the full picture of the Rohingya’s situation, especially at the hotels they managed. My impression from all the foreign staff I spoke with was that they themselves had nothing against Rohingya Muslims, their priority number one were to get the best trained and skilled staff they could find. Several of them also told me that they wanted nothing to do with this conflict in Rakhine, as they were there do run a hotel. They quickly realized though that this was a luxury they could not have.

Just one week prior to my arrival in Ngapali there had been a massive conflict at one of the hotels, which ended with a staff walkout. This was in the middle of high season therefore affecting the hotel immensely when no staff was left at the hotel. Ngapali is a small community and with only nineteen hotels, staff at the different hotels had a pretty clear picture of what was going on in all the hotels. This walkout therefore became a topic in all my interviews, as everyone knew what had happened and wanted to discuss it. The staff walkout happened at one of the more elegant hotels and started with a fair discussion about the service money (in other countries it is called gratitude pay). The practice with service money was common in Ngapali and should not be confused with the tip money. Service money was in Ngapali actually paid...
every month as a part of the staff’s wages and was 10% of the hotel’s total revenue split equally on all staff. The service money could be an additional 60 000 kyat to 150 000 kyat (60$ to 150$) to a wage every month. What started out being a fair discussion about a relevant issue for the staff continued unfortunately to become a conflict between the hotel’s Buddhists staff and the hotel’s Rohingya head of human resources (HR). The GM at the hotel chose to move the head of HR into a lower level position in the accounting department as “it is impossible to have Rohingya in management positions in Ngapali” people explained to me on several occasions.

Members of the Rakhine nationalistic political party went around to all the hotels and asked (demanded) that they let their Muslim staff go according to Sara. Again it was clear to me that the few international staff working (mostly as GMs and assisting GMs) in Ngapali had not grasped the severity of the situation or had believed that this somehow would not concern them. Sara and other GMs I spoke to were quite shocked when the men from this party started visiting the hotels, but they stated clearly to me that they did not listen to these men.

When the burning of Muslim houses happened in 2013 and led to a curfew in both Thandwe and Ngapali, the Rohingya that feared for they safety if they tried getting to work were offered unpaid leave until the situation got more calm according to Jay. When I asked why they were not offered paid leave I was told that this would be unfair to the majority workers at the hotel which were Buddhists and that it would lead to a conflict as the Buddhists would not tolerate what they would see as an actual benefit only valid for the Rohingya.

Unfortunately this rather grim picture was confirmed to apply to Yangon as well. I interviewed the GM of one of Yangon’s finest hotels, opened in 1901 and comparable to the Raffles in Singapore. They did not employ any Muslims. When I asked Hans, who worked at NGO supporting sustainable tourism, if anyone tried to do anything to influence the hotels or the local authorities to employ Rohingya he said that this is not a priority.
Although most hotels in Ngapali had a few Rohingya employed, none of the hotels had more than 10% Rohingya employed I managed to find out. The general day-to-day work went fine but conflicts were never far away. The GMs and other management staff had to carefully balance their words and actions in order to keep the working environment peaceful. It was also important not to have any Rohingya in management positions, at the very least not in any HR positions. The GMs at the hotels originally did not have anything against the Rohingya, and I believe they would still be quite positive about hiring a Rohingya person with excellent skills and experience. The conflict in region and at the hotels did not leave them uninfluenced though. The GMs I spoke to were quite evident stating that they would like the working environment to be free of conflicts and sadly a solution would be not to actively recruit any Rohingya. They did not say this to me explicitly but when I asked if they had any plans to recruit more Rohingya the answers were no.
Chapter 7 – Hospitality training

The hospitality training caught my interest early on as I was very much interested in job opportunities as a tool for development but also as a tool for empowerment of local population. Ngapali (and Rakhine state) as a tourism destination is under imminent threat because of conflicts and I feared that the job opportunities I had identified soon could become irrelevant, but if capacity building and hospitality training was a part of these job opportunities the local population could still use the skills and their experiences acquired in the tourism sector located elsewhere.

All my informants in the hotel sector talked about the hospitality training the hotels offered during the rainy season. As the hotels recruited as many people as they could from the nearby communities they had to provide training for the staff, because many employees were fairly new to the hotel sector or had very little formal education. Staff either received training at the hotel they held their employment at, or they were in fact sent to hotels in other tourism destinations in Burma, such as Inle Lake, Bagan and Yangon. Many of the hotels in Ngapali belonged to hotel chains so it was both practical and easily done to send staff to receive training at their hotels in other destinations. These destinations see tourists throughout the year, even during the rainy season, as they are not completely closed such as Ngapali beach. According to my informants this hospitality training at other destinations was also used to premiere staff showing a high interest in their work and as thank you for good performances. Many of the Ngapali staff had not travelled before they were sent to other hotels to receive training. Although it could seem like a frightening experience at first, I spoke to many who had really enjoyed their training, but at the same time they were very certain that they would stay in Ngapali (home) and not request a transfer to other hotels (which was an option at certain hotels). If they were sent to another hotel they kept their full wages and was in addition to that given a per diem for food, and housing.

7.1 Ngapali English school

Ngapali, although small in size, had one English school, teaching students enough English so they could start working at the hotels. I spent a lot of time in this school and got to know several of the teachers and the students. Su, who was one of the
teachers, explained to me how the public school in Ngapali and in the rest of Burma worked. Schools in Burma are suffering from decades of lack of resources; the teachers receive a very low salary leading to a lack of educated teachers. As I previously mentioned in another context, I was told again how the teachers were afraid of students, parents and government officials thus leading to an environment of fear and uncertainty. This created an environment not ideal for learning. Burmese schools are in general old fashion in the sense that students are not encouraged to take initiative or to ask questions, instead it is learning by heart and constant repetitions of very old learning material that are the common method for learning.

In this school in Ngapali they taught differently. Su had previously worked as a receptionist at one of the elegant hotels in Ngapali and brought with her an understanding of what was important to know when working at a hotel. Good spoken English so the staff could communicate with the guests and provide service was obviously one of the most important things according to Su. And spoken English was the main subject at the school. But they also focused on a number of issues relevant to the tourism sector. Geography, for instance, to learn about the countries the tourists came from and how people from different cultures could behave in a different manner than Burmese. In 2010 they started with computer training because many of the hotels had computers and when working in the reception you needed computer skills. At the time I visited in 2014 they had 217 students and taught five classes per day, in addition to activities on the weekends and summer holidays. As I am still receiving news from the school I know that by 2018 they have about 600 students and are in the process of building (yet) another new school building.

The hotels in Ngapali were also thrilled that this school existed as I have explained they preferred to hire staff from the local communities around Ngapali. Su stated that a job at any of these hotels that the English school trained them for, could break the cycle of poverty, as these students would earn more money than their parents had ever done. The hotels also contributed to the schools in various ways, and especially one hotel located next to the school almost shared their premises with the school.
Su also provided me with all the newsletters written by the school since it opened in 2003. Those letters were of great value for me to read and learn from, and also to understand the journey this school had been through. Hospitality training, and especially English training in this area is of the outmost importance for children. In all my material and my interviews I could clearly see how important this was for the creation of job opportunities. I could also read and ask questions about the numerous challenges the community and the English school had experienced, and also about the efforts made to sort out and work through the difficult times. For instance the population in this area never ate fruit and very little vegetables, as this was too expensive, which led to malnourished children and in severe cases, rickets disease. The English school then decided to grow fruit themselves and planted hundreds of fruit and nut trees to make sure the children got enough vitamins. Very few of the children had ever had a toothbrush and toothpaste, much less been to the dentist, so the English school decided to embark on a project that included getting a dentist to the school. The idea was to provide the children with toothbrush and toothpaste, and learn how to use them.

When the school had been up and running for a few years they managed to attract funding for a pre-school for small children as they had noticed that students dropped out both from the English school but also from the local municipality school since they had to look after their younger siblings. In Ngapali as well as in other areas in Burma (which I mentioned previously) people used to practice open defecation. This practice together with a poor hygiene in general led to diseases and poor health. This in turn affected the participation negatively amongst children in public schools and the English school in Ngapali. The English school decided to reach out to its donors and was able to build proper sanitation facilities, not only at the school, but also at various locations in Ngapali as to increase people’s health so the children could attend school. The school also launched a program to educate the children of the importance of good hygiene and how to achieve it. The school did what they could with their funding and it was clear that they contributed greatly to area but Su explained that many children unfortunately still dropped out from the schools because they needed to start work to support their families.
This school did not teach English as to prepare the students for university studies or studies beyond secondary school. They simply taught English and other tourism related topics to prepare the students for work at the hotels in Ngapali (and perhaps Thandwe). Su told me that this was a clever move from the school as parents were very happy to send their children to this English school as they wanted their children to stay in Ngapali area when they grew up and started working. Su was confident that if the school had focused on preparing the children for university studies, which would have led to the children moving to Sittwe or Yangon as there were no universities closer, they would not have manage to attract students and such a big support from their parents. Su proudly said that parents contacted the school to ask if there was room for their children. Su told me even more proud that it still turned out that some of the children nonetheless got a taste for learning and chose to leave Ngapali for Yangon, university studies and high skilled jobs. The first year the school was operating (2003) they had eight students and two of those are today working in Yangon with computers, Su said. She also had numerous other stories of students attending university to become teachers and/or prior students that moved to the cities to work, although she stated that the school’s focus still was to primarily train the students in English for work at the hotels. The idea was that the children went to the local municipality schools as usual and then attended the English school for two hours English training in the morning or in the afternoon. Burmese school have summer holiday from the end of February until June and during this period (weather permitting) the hospitality school had more classes than the rest of the year.

7.2 Hospitality training at the eco lodge
The eco lodge offered hospitality training at their premises during rainy season when they and other hotels were closed. The training included everything from cooking to housekeeping to front desk management, and was all free of charge. This hospitality training the eco lodge provided, was one of the social projects my informant at the lodge mentioned. Staff from many of the other hotels did their hospitality training at the eco lodge. These were primarily hotels that did not belong to a hotel chain and the somewhat simpler hotels, which did not have the resources to send their staff to other destinations. The GMs I interviewed at the hotels in Ngapali spoke very highly of the eco lodge and its hospitality training, even if they had their own hospitality training.
Many of their staff had participated in the eco lodge’s hospitality training prior to their employment at these hotels if/when they were employed at the guesthouses in Ngapali. It was quite common as I have previously mention that staff, and especially qualified staff, were able to change jobs and negotiate better terms in their contracts.

At the eco lodge they also taught English, but their primary focus was vocational training in the various occupations the hotels offered. In addition the students that attended the vocational training took part in many of the social projects the eco lodge organised. For instance when the lodge chose to organise a waste collection project their students also participated in this. In this way the eco lodge operated quite similar to the English school. They as well realised that the students needed more general knowledge on issues connected to tourism even if these issues was not directly relevant to their jobs at the hotels.

Compared to the English school the eco lodge had fewer resources, which naturally affected the quality of the hospitality training. Nonetheless it provided the students with very useful and basic knowledge of most occupations at the hotels. They only offered hospitality training during the rainy season when the eco lodge and most of Ngapali closed down which also may have affected the student’s progression. The English school had classes throughout the year and with more resources the students benefitted from this continuation.
Chapter 8 – Working conditions in the tourism sector

The general lack of labour unions and collective agreements affect the working conditions in the tourism sector. In addition, weak law and regulations, and the enforcement of these, especially when it comes to child labour is problematic. In this chapter I will discuss the recent development of the minimum wages in Burma and how this is linked to the tourism sector.

8.1 Minimum wage

In a meeting with Steve from the ILO (International Labour Organization) he explained the focus of the work in Burma. Their primary focus in 2014 was to establish a minimum wage. Prior to 2014 there were no minimum wage in Burma, so to establish one was essential to the ILO. In September 2015 a minimum wage was agreed upon. It ended at 3600 kyat, which then were about 3$. It was the garment sector in Yangon who led the fight for minimum wages, which also benefitted the tourism sector.

Yangon has a quite large industrial zone and a substantial garment sector. Among other Swedish Hennes & Mauritz (H&M) produce clothes in these factories I learned. I was able to visit one of the H&M’s factories and to observe the work. This was (as most are in Yangon) a Chinese owned factory. This meant that management were Chinese and that there were no representatives from H&M at the factory on a daily basis. In a power point presentation they clearly stated that they preferred being in Burma and Yangon as workers in general were docile and accepted low wages. Workers in this industrial zone organised collectively and their demands against the government and factories owners was not heard at first, and therefore led to strikes, sit-in protests and demonstrations. The protests were though a success as it lead to an established minimum wage for all sectors in Burma.

In the beginning of 2018 the minimum wage were raised again. This time to 4800 kyat, which now is about 3.60$. And once again it was the garment factors in Yangon’s industrial zone that were in the centrum of the arguments between the government, owners of the factories and the workers. The arguments were the same as in 2015. The business owners claimed they could not afford to pay the new minimum
wage or if they did productivity needed to rise accordingly. The workers on their side still claimed that the minimum wage was too low because commodities are getting more and more expensive in Yangon, but even in other Burmese cities. Labour unions in Yangon as elsewhere in world have now shifted the focus from establishing minimum wages to establish living wages.

Yangon being the biggest city in Burma and the de-facto capital naturally becomes the centrum for labour unions and their work. The garment sector is leading the way in Burma when it comes to labour unions and collective agreements. The spillover effects are reaching the tourism sector and Ngapali as well. The minimum wage that was decided upon in 2015 and later increased in 2018 also applies to Ngapali and the tourism sector. Even though most staff employed at the hotels in Ngapali had wages above the minimum wage the establishment of a minimum wage is nonetheless still beneficial to the tourism sector.

8.2 Child Labour
In the same meeting Steve explained that Burma has had, and still has severe problems with child and forced labour. To end these practices is therefore still a priority in Burma. Especially child labour has proven difficult to combat as it is quite widespread and because it is often not considered harmful to the children according to several of my informants. It complicates the matter further stated Anna, my informant working at a European embassy, in situations where the child is the breadwinner of the family. This they had observed at numerous occasions. According to the ILO Minimum Age Convention, article 7 (1973), children are allowed to engage in light work from the age of thirteen, as long as this does not affect their schooling. This is of course a part of the problem, many children work too much, which make them miss school. In addition it is not uncommon that children even below the age of thirteen work instead of attending school.

Child work could be observed in Ngapali. I never observed it at the hotels, but the group of workers constructing the road did have several children among them. Many of these were clearly below the age of thirteen. In addition the construction of roads may not be considered light work. It may in fact be considered quite hazardous,
especially since they primarily used manual labour. Roads in Ngapali are generally constructed with concrete and not asphalt, which make the construction process somewhat safer, but it is still work children below the age of eighteen are not allowed to engage in according to the ILO Minimum Age Convention, article 3 (1973). In many of my interviews with the staff from the hotels the use of child labour in road construction came up. They all felt it was very wrong, but they also felt that this was not something they could do anything about. The construction workers were often a form of travellers, going from place to place looking for construction work. The construction workers were mostly men, but several children and women also travelled with them, doing various forms of construction work. The women, if not working with construction, cocked and clean in their camp area. This was of a simple standard, often they lived in tents and they had no access to proper sanitation. Vicky at the MCRB stated that this is a risk for Ngapali’s future as a tourism destination as western tourists may stop coming because they are very much opposed to child labour. As these construction workers are travelling from place to place the issue is difficult to solve since they have very little contact with relevant authorities.

The English school in Ngapali also experienced the issue with child labour. It was not at all uncommon that the children had to stop attending the school because they were forced to find a job in order to support their families. In addition it was not at all uncommon that they stop attending school because they had to look after their siblings. They, as I have mentioned started various programs to keep children attending the school, among them day care facilities for the children’s younger siblings.

8.3 Labour unions in the tourism sector

The formation of labour unions has unfortunately not happened in the hotel sector of Ngapali quite yet. But there are labour unions in the tourism sectors in Bagan and Yangon, which is a very positive step. It is rather given that the formation of labour unions in the tourism sector departs from the two biggest tourism destinations in Burma. It is also my hope that that the spillover effects will reach Ngapali, just like the spillover effects from the garment sector’s fight for minimum wages reached the tourism sector.
The International Union for food, agriculture, hotel, restaurant, catering, tobacco and allied worker’s association (IUF) represent workers employed in agriculture and plantations, manufacturing of food and beverage, hotels, restaurants and catering services and all stages of tobacco processing. They have labour union members in 130 countries, among them Burma. Yong is the head representative from Burma, although he residence in Thailand. When I spoke to him he explained that the IUF in Burma is focusing on the four major tourist destinations in Burma; Yangon, Mandalay, Bagan and Inle. This is quite natural as these destinations see considerable more tourists than Ngapali. Being the country’s finest beach destination Ngapali sees a decent amount of tourists (mostly international ones, but more and more domestic tourists are finding their way to Ngapali), but not anything like the numbers of tourists visiting Yangon, Inle, Bagan and Mandalay. This, unfortunately make NGOs or the labour unions not really focusing on Ngapali as a tourism destination. In addition Ngapali is quite isolated and being such a small destination/place it does not have any permanent presence from any labour unions (or in fact any NGOs) making the formation of labour unions even more complicated and difficult. Yong was though very clear when stating that if workers in Ngapali started to organise the IUF would provide support.

There are also two other IUF-affiliated labour unions that are active in the tourism sector and the first one is the Agriculture and Farmers Federation of Myanmar (AFFM). This is a labour union for various ‘food workers’. This mean that this is a labour union the food and beverage staff at the hotel could join. Htet is the union leader and he told me that they are actually active in Ngapali with two small farmer’s unions. Their primarily focus is, or have been, the agriculture and plantation sector. They have tried to establish labour unions at the hotels in Ngapali, which have been done in Bagan, but unfortunately this have not worked (yet) in Ngapali according to Htet.

The establishment of a working labour union in the hotels in Bagan is according to Vicky at the MCRB quite a success story. Hotel Chitthu Township Level Labour Organization Bagan-Nyaung Oo (HLOB) is affiliated to the IUF and was established there in 2014. Lina at the Swedish Hotel and Restaurant Workers’ Union (HRF) told me about their project in Burma, which is to strengthen labour unions and/or
supporting the formation of them. She was able to visited Bagan and conduct a workshop on union rights at one of the HLOB hotels in Bagan. It was also at a hotel in Bagan were five labour union leaders got their contracts terminated because of their involvement with a labour union. After a lot of international solidarity and a notice to the ILO they were reinstated. Both Lina and Vicky spoke of this as exceptional and unfortunately unlikely to happen anywhere else in Burma.

Even though there are some examples of working labour unions in the tourism sector there has in general been no collective bargaining agreement in tourism sector yet according to Yong at the IUF. One of their goals is to get workers improving their working conditions and wages through agreement negotiated with employer. When Lina and HRF visited HLOB in Bagan 2015 practice in collective bargaining were high on the agenda.

The lack of labour unions in the tourism sector and other sectors must be seen in connection with the military regime were labour unions were forbidden and freedom of speech were severely limited. Historically leaders of labour unions have been in exile I learned during my fieldwork. After the semi-democratic elections in 2010 the people were extremely hopeful and many steps were taken to achieve a democracy but a general acceptance for labour unions have still not happened.

Vicky at the MCRB states that they in general have found hotel-workers in the tourism sector reluctant to unionise because they feel too exposed. Yong at the IUF explains this further:

“Setting up democratic and independent trade unions in Myanmar is still a very challenging work. Workers are at risk of being victimized, especially being dismissed from the job. Hotel owners, especially the large ones including international brands, are known as prominent tycoons in the country, whose businesses are not only limited to tourism sector”.

Yong mentions the tycoons, which are the same as the cronies I mentioned in a previous chapter. They belong to a very powerful elite in Burma and they may even
own hotels of international brands. For instance, many of my informants in Yangon spoke of the ownership of the newly opened Novotel in Yangon in 2014. A very well known crony was behind the hotel. Cronies also own several of the hotels in Ngapali. These cronies are former military junta members or in other way connected with the military junta, still install fear in many Burmese people. That a hotel is crony owned does therefore not create an environment of trust leading to establishment of labour unions.

Lina at HRF stated that it is very difficult to start labour unions in Burma as the country has been closed to the rest of the world and ruled by a military regime for decades. She also stated that the people are hungry for knowledge and so eager to learn about human rights and union rights. Therefore it is important that we use the chance we have to inform and educate people in Burma about these issues. When I spoke to leaders of the labour unions I got this impression myself. They always wanted more information, resources and was very eager to learn from whoever had information.

When I conducted my fieldwork in 2014 there were no labour unions active in the hotel sector in Ngapali. Six hotels were asked specifically if they allowed for labour unions and/or had collective agreements. I quickly realized though that many had no knowledge of this, so I needed to rethink my approach when I asked questions. One out of six hotels stated that they had collective agreements and allowed for labour unions, but my follow-up questions identified that they did not. This was also supported when I interviewed representatives from labour unions in Burma. They stated that there were no labour unions active in the hotel sector in Ngapali. I don’t believe the one hotel that stated they allowed for labour unions and collective agreements lied on purpose. I believe they just answered they allowed for it because it was easy to say so and that they lacked specific knowledge of labour unions. My questions also identified that many were uncertain what a labour union really was.

The government of Burma in cooperation with NGOs in the country working on sustainable tourism have developed three different tourism policies; The Myanmar
tourism master plan\textsuperscript{7}, Policy on community involvement in tourism\textsuperscript{8} and Responsible tourism policy\textsuperscript{9}. None of the tourism policies mention labour unions, or the importance of them. This is in my opinion is unfortunate as labour unions could have contributed with solutions in many of the aspects the policies are mentioning. In addition labour unions could work to achieve safety for workers, living wages, limit the number of hours in a workweek, the right to continuing education and stop discrimination of women and ethnic groups in the work place.

The ILO, according to Steve, also worked on getting Burma to compel to other ILO standards and conventions, capacity building and on strengthen the freedom of association. These factors are connected and hopefully they may help to combat the issue with child labour and in the long run help to establish more labour unions. The ILO is obviously not opposed to labour unions but as I grasped their work in Burma nonetheless have had a somewhat different focus than to establish these.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{7} \url{http://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Core_Doc_Myanmar_Tourism_Master_Plan_2013-2020.pdf}
\item \textsuperscript{8} \url{http://www.tourism.gov.mm/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Community-Involvement-Tourism-in-Myanmar.pdf}
\item \textsuperscript{9} \url{http://www.tourismtransparency.org/sites/default/files/Myanmar%20Responsible%20Tourism%20Policy%202012.pdf}
\end{itemize}
Chapter 9 – Concluding discussion

The Burmese government has worked hard to develop a tourism sector. Against the backdrop of violent conflicts in several locations in the country, local conflicts and a fragile semi-democratic government there was an over-all idea and hope that tourism would lead to income in terms of job opportunities and revenue for the state. I hope I have been able to provide answers to my previous asked questions; what kind of focus had the government when they developed tourism Ngapali? And how did the development of tourism affect Ngapali? If not, I hope the following concluding discussion will clarify unresolved issues.

As I mentioned Chok, Macbeth and Waren (2007) point out that if structural inequalities are not addressed, long-term benefits for marginalized groups are not likely to be gained. My research in Ngapali showed that the government unfortunately did not address these inequalities. There have been very few workshops (if none at all) in Ngapali with different stakeholders aiming at increase and encourage participation from local communities, and structural inequalities in Ngapali and Rakhine have not been dealt with.

The structural discrimination the Rohingya suffers from is partly directly the fault of the government and there is by the beginning of 2018 no signs of a betterment of the situation. The few Rohingya employed at the hotels still experience hardship at their workplace. There have been discussions in Ngapali regarding the fishermen and their practice of drying fish on the beach, between local officials and the fishermen. They had been allotted a new area, but unfortunately local authorities failed to understand that this area was too far away thus making it useless for the already marginalized fishermen. The issue of land grabbing and/or unclear land rights have not been dealt with either. The regional conflict in Rakhine state and the local conflict in Ngapali, if getting more serious, may cause tourists to stop coming altogether. Nothing is as bad for tourism and tourist arrivals as violence, war and conflicts.

Elliot (2006) also states that a necessary condition for sustainable development and poverty alleviation is the participation of local communities and empowerment. I do believe that many members of the local communities in and around Ngapali felt
empowered as they received training and quite well paid jobs. In addition it was a competition among the hotels to recruit the most skilled workers, which also led to empowerment, especially among those staff that had the skills the hotels sought after. But it was still no real participation from local communities when the government planned the tourism in Ngapali. The government still used their system of hotel zones in Ngapali. The newest hotel zone in Ngapali is now being planned at the stretch of beach closest to the airport. To my knowledge there has been no local community involvement in this decision.

Butcher (2003) claims that community-based tourism is the most ethical tourism today and highlights the high level of community involvement in this type of tourism. The Burmese government chose to change the name community-based tourism into community involvement in tourism as not to have the people participate too much in the tourism sector. In their community involvement policy they state it is because the Burmese people is not ready to participate because they lack skills. There may quite well be something in this stated Hans, one of my informants. Prior to 2010 people were really not encouraged to participate in the tourism sector or any other sector for that matter, making participation a somewhat vague concept he said.

Stronza (2005) comments on this issue as well, and she states that participation may have a different meaning to all involved parties in community-based tourism projects. Often she says to get members of a community to participate this involves an approach somewhere between persuasion and informing. Most importantly though, Stronza (ibid.) states that to manage the concept of participation one must cover the question on who is to participate, but also how to participate. This, the Burmese government have not managed to accomplish. Instead of just renaming community-based tourism to community involvement in tourism they should have, rather have trained the communities in participation. Stronza (ibid.) speaks of stakeholder analysis and the importance of these, as participation is one of the cornerstones in community-based tourism. These stakeholder analysis, I believe could have been held and with competent trainers real participation for local communities in Ngapali could have been achieved.
Nawijn et al. (2008) state that it is the local communities that must change and adapt their culture in order to attract tourists. It is not the tourists that must adapt. Tourists have many destinations to choose from, but local communities can only choose from attracting tourists or not, state Nawijn et al. (ibid.). Butcher (2003) confirms these thoughts when he states that even if there is participation from local communities there may often not be enough choices to call it real participation. He points out how in poor rural communities where community-based tourism is advocated these different choices may not exist, and the ones offering investment and aid may set an agenda. In Ngapali the government sat the agenda when they chose to develop tourism and the specific tourism they wanted (expensive hotels in hotel zones). Ngapali area is quite poor so even if members of the community were encouraged to participate there would quite possible be a very limited numbers of alternatives to tourism, if any at all. But if local population were encouraged to share their ideas or encouraged to take part in creative workshops, they may might come up with excellent ideas, especially since they know the area and by that know what could work or not.

The west-south tourism as Nawijn et al. (2008) call it, is very valid for Burma and Ngapali. Western tourists are almost exclusively arriving to Burma by air, as it is very difficult to cross Burmese boarders on foot or by bus/car/train. In addition tourists most commonly travel by air inside Burma. From Yangon to Ngapali extremely few choose to do the overland route that takes minimum 24 hours by bus. To my knowledge there are few tourism arrivals in Burma from neighbouring countries. Unfortunately they too are arriving by air, but they have at least not travelled as far by air as Americans and/or Europeans have. Domestic tourism in Burma is very limited, although with one exception; the pilgrimage sites. Those, and I have visited several of them; see many Burmese tourists or pilgrims. The Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon is for Burmese Buddhists what Mecca is for the world’s Muslims. One fisherman in Ngapali told me proudly that he had been in Yangon and visited the Shwedagon Pagoda. The general use of air transport within Burma and to reach Burma, is an isolated factor that unfortunately makes the tourism in the country unsustainable.
The roads in Burma are of such low quality that air transportation is the recommended alternative. When the government chose to move the capital from Yangon to Naypyidaw none of the NGOs, CSOs, businesses or embassies chose to move to the new capital thus making everyone that have to have meetings with the government frequent flyers. There is actually a decent highway by Burmese standards between Yangon and Naypyidaw, but as one are not able to make the trip back and forth over a working day, and the fact that decent standard in Burma mean that one is not recommended to drive on the highway after dark, most people choose to fly. But this lack of proper infrastructure is a factor that limits the amount of tourists choosing, or in fact, the amount that are able to visit the country. In addition the number of hotels are also relatively few. Ngapali had in 2014 nineteen hotels, none with more than a 120 rooms. The situation is quite the same in the rest of Burma and because of few hotels and poor infrastructure the number of tourists will restrict itself thus leading to less impact on the environment.

Gössling et al. (2012) speaks of water use both direct and indirect. Tourists often arrive in the dry season states Gössling et al. (ibid.) when water is restricted and there is very little rain. This is the case with Ngapali as well. In the rainy season there are no tourists there at all, but in the dry season when there is less water, the hotels are full. The tourists’ use of resources is generally problematic in Ngapali. Severe electricity shortages are common in Ngapali (all hotels needs to have at least two generators and an engineer employed) as hotels are forced to share what little electricity there is, with the local communities. This may lead to conflicts as more and more hotels are built, and Ngapali is further developed.

The period of rainy season was problematic to many of the residents in Ngapali, not only those working in the tourism sector. Because of heavy rain there were many weeks one could not get any work within the farming and fishing sectors. Other day jobs, such as building roads and different construction work were not available either because of the bad weather. Unfortunately I was told if the fishermen were desperate enough they took they fishing boats out even if there was a storm and deaths did occur from time to time. Personally I never experienced the rainy season in Ngapali but I did in Yangon. On certain days it was almost impossible to venture outside and
there were flooding everywhere. Fishing and the drying of fish is still the main source of income in Ngapali. Because of overfishing though there are less and less fish to be caught. During rainy season they cannot fish at all, but at the same time there are no tourists there either so it is difficult to say that tourism would be the solution for Ngapali. Perhaps a further diversifying from fishing, farming and tourism to some other industry could be a sustainable solution.

I mentioned the various forms of sustainable tourism in chapter four. Common for them all is that they all have a focus on participation from local communities, but otherwise they are somewhat different. In my opinion one need to take the different forms of sustainable tourism and look at them separately to see if they could fit a given tourist destination. Not all forms of sustainable tourism could work in every tourism destination. Ecotourism for instance as West and Carrier (2004) explains normally involves an idea of travelling in a way that have minimum impact on the environment while at the same time one would enjoy different features of the natural environment. Contact with local population (often an indigenous one) is normal and eco tourists often pay entrance fees to national parks and reserves, which help to support these. Ngapali is not a national park or a reserve, although one could say that being on a beach is all about enjoying the natural environment. One could also say that all tourism is about (or perhaps should be about) interaction with local population, but as I observed and experienced the tourism in Ngapali this was not really the case. The tourists were respectful in most aspects but it was clear that the purpose was sunbathing and relaxation on the beach, and not interaction with local population. The population in Ngapali were members of ordinary communities most with employment at the hotels, or a farmers and fishermen. In order for eco tourism to be development it is important to see if members of local communities actually want this interaction or if they see their work as just work. As Wallace and Diamente (2005) state it is important that ecotourism projects take into account the need of the people of the local community and not only environmental and conservation issues which I believe is very valid point, especially in the context of Ngapali.

The culture effects Nawijn et al. (2008) mentioned was a list of what tourists enjoys on holiday. Preserving culture was not one of them and although I in general observed
and felt that tourists in Ngapali behaved in respectful way, the practice of drying fish on the beach was a practice the hotels and the tourists did not respect nor supported. This was a part of the fishermen’s and their families’ livelihood and had been for decades, and ironically this was something that made Ngapali an authentic destination. Still tourists, but perhaps even more the hotels, could not respect this.

Mason (2005) describes heritage tourism as tourism that preserve heritage resources while at the same time avoid marginalization, benefit the local economy and serve the community members needs. I believe that this form of sustainable tourism focus could benefit Ngapali as this form focus on preserving heritage resources. The practice of drying fish on the beach is a practice that deserves to be preserved. Not only it is decades old, but it is also a practice fundamental to the fishermen’s livelihoods. Heritage tourism has an element in it that respect these practices, which I believe would be beneficial for Ngapali. Pro-poor tourism on the other hand is discussed in terms of what is beneficial for the poor and the economic benefits are considered the most important states Butcher (2003). A too strong focus on this approach in Ngapali I believe would not support the fishermen’s way of life as the hotels have much bigger revenue than the fishermen.

But perhaps is Butcher (2003) worth listening to when he explains that forms of sustainable tourism are small-scale, and by that we need to understand that since they in fact are small scale by the very nature, the impact for local communities is often small as well. For me who started this research with an idea to see if tourism and specifically sustainable tourism could work as a tool for poverty reduction this was very interesting. If tourism is to work as tool for poverty reduction it need to attract a great deal of people (tourists) to have an impact.

Butcher (ibid.) states that mass tourism and large hotels have a much bigger potential to attract a larger number of tourists, but that they focus on the comfort of guests and not environmental issues. But since it is large scale it attracts large numbers of tourists and become a huge job provider. Eco tourism can according to Butcher (ibid.) not provide anywhere near this amount of jobs or foreign exchange. But he also state that the failure of modern mass tourism is that the sector does not manage to team up with
local suppliers and continue to import food and beverage articles from abroad. In Ngapali though this was not the case. Most hotels in Ngapali did source many items locally. The elegant hotels could have been better of course but even they bought fish from the local fishermen everyday, vegetables from Thandwe market and they had (in addition to foreign wines and beer) local wine and beer. This along with the fact that the hotels did recruit most staff locally, made the tourism sector in Ngapali, although quite small scale, avoid this failure so common at many tourism destinations around the world. It is difficult to say that it was mass tourism in Ngapali, the destination was too small for that, but there was not a focus on sustainable tourism either (perhaps except for the only eco tourism hotel). The focus on recruiting staff and source food and beverage items locally was though a step in the right direction to make the tourism sustainable. Pro-poor tourism is according to Butcher (2003) a form of tourism that emphasise forming ties between the poor communities and the formal sector. This focus would benefit local suppliers in a tourism destination and have to a certain extent been done already in Ngapali. I am sure that a stronger focus on this would benefit even more suppliers and by that lead to a greater poverty reduction.

One last factor that may have an impact on the numbers of tourists visiting Ngapali (and the rest of Burma) and therefore the tourism sector in general is the price level. This was somewhat outside the scope for my thesis but as several informants spoke of this it is worth mentioning. The prices in Ngapali but also in the rest of Burma are very high. They are especially high if one compares prices in the region. This was brought up in many interviews, as informants were worried about how these prices would affect the tourism in Burma. When the country opened up in 2010 the number of tourists exploded and the numbers continued to increase the following years as many had waited a long time and were very curious to see and explore, and most importantly they were willing to pay the high prices. In 2014 the absolutely cheapest room was a 20$ per night room with shared bathroom in Yangon. In Ngapali they did not have this cheap form of accommodation but if one were very lucky one managed to get a room at a guesthouse for 60$. Burma still sees considerable fewer tourists than their neighbouring countries and partly this is because many tourists simply cannot afford to visit Burma. But as with the poor infrastructure this is a factor that restrict the number of tourists visiting Burma and thus contribute to sustainability.
This issue of pricing may unfortunately make all other discussions unnecessary as the practice with (unreasonable) high prices may lead to very few tourists.

The Brundtland report (WCED:1987) spoke of the three components of sustainable development; social, economic and environmental and that all three components are needed to reach sustainable development. To me it is clear that several good practices have developed in Ngapali, especially social and economic ones. Perhaps the best practice is the over-all focus the hotels have on recruiting staff from the local communities and how they provide them with training. There is unfortunately a lot left when it comes to environmental issues. The fact that the English school and the hospitality school at the eco lodge both are having projects that centre around the importance of waste collection is of course good, but the local municipality should be in charge of this. Sand mining and dynamite fishing in the area are both practices that cause severe damage to the environment. The hotel’s use of what little water and electricity resources there is may be considered a problematic environmental issue. Lastly the practice of flying to and from Ngapali (but also in and out of Burma) causes negative impact on the environment.

Many issues have come up during my research that makes me fear Ngapali’s future as a (sustainable) tourism destination. The government’s use of hotel zones is problematic and while crony involvement and land grabbing are constant unresolved issues, there are also the local conflict in Ngapali between the fishermen and the hotels regarding the use of the beach. The use of child labour, if not by the hotels, is sad to witness and make it evident that Ngapali is still a poor area. Finally the Burmese army (and by that the Burmese government) violent actions against the Rohingya are very much an on-going conflict in Rakhine. Ngapali have been speared the worst but I have shown the discrimination the Rohingya are exposed to at the hotels they work in. Unfortunately the over-all situation for the Rohingya in Rakhine seems to have no solution or hope of betterment as of April 2018. It is difficult to predict how and if this will affect the tourism in Ngapali. It also troubles me that people who gave up traditional jobs such as fishing, or all those employed in the tourism sector risk being without jobs or opportunities if the sector fails. I believe I have shown how fragile the tourism is in Ngapali, but also how fragile the whole
country is. Ridden by civil war for decades, the abysmal situation for the Rohingya in Rakhine, corruption by cronies and a government who develops tourism without proper participation from its people and communities.

Unfortunately no labour unions were present in the hotel sector in Ngapali. For the social component of sustainable tourism labour unions can play a vital part as it provide workers with stability and security. The labour union is though ready to provide support if anyone express an interest in establishing one. This may be problematic in my opinion as it put the responsible on the individual worker or group of workers. It would be beneficial if the labour unions could visit Ngapali and explain the form of support they could give. I have already shown in my previous chapters that the hotels in Ngapali prefer to recruit staff from the local communities in and around Ngapali which is positive, but this also mean that many staff have not visited or worked in other destinations and been exposed to labour unions. That a minimum wage was established in 2015 is though an important, first step in creating greater security for the staff in the tourism sector.

I hoped to have shown some very positive results of the tourism in Ngapali as well. As I started research for this thesis with a focus on job opportunities for local population in the tourism sector I was very happy when my research showed that most hotels wanted too and in fact did recruit people from the local communities in and around Ngapali. The beach restaurants and the small shops in the villages only had local people employed, the fruit sellers and the boat owners, if with some uncertainty, made a decent day wage. As tourism is seasonal I was very pleased to see that the hotels pay their staff between 50% and 70% of their wages during rainy season when the hotels are closed. In addition most hotels did some sort of hospitality training these months leading to higher skills both in term of technical knowledge but also language skills. It is my hope that these skills will help them to find work in other tourism destinations in Burma if the situation in Ngapali and Rakhine unravel. The over all community benefited indirectly from tourism, such as the fishermen, farmers and construction workers but I am relieved that many have kept these occupations. Albeit benefiting from the tourism, they will have an occupation to fall back on if conflict/s make tourists stop visiting Ngapali.
When discussing tourism, the various forms of sustainable tourism or mass tourism as a tool for poverty reduction I believe it can be helpful not seeing the different forms of tourism as mutually exclusive. Mass tourism that employ huge numbers of people and attracts huge numbers of tourists, all forms of sustainable tourism and the case of Ngapali were staff is recruited locally and food and beverages items were sourced locally (if possible) are all forms of tourism the tourism sector can be inspired by and learn from. Transport as I have touched upon is a factor of great importance and perhaps the biggest hinder for tourism to become sustainable. For tourism to become a tool for poverty reduction and at the same time be sustainable, innovative solutions are in my opinion needed, especially in the transport sector. No panacea for this has been found but I would like to encourage representatives from all these different forms of tourism to work together in creation sustainable solutions.

In this master thesis I have tried to nuance and problematize the development of tourism in Burma showing that it can in fact have positive outcomes for workers. The tourism sector must not be viewed in simple terms as good or bad, black or white. It has simultaneously produced improved situations for workers at hotels and consequently their families who benefit from their wages. On the other hand, other people’s livelihoods are at risk, specifically the fishermen and the Rohingya who faces structural discrimination, both in the workplace and outside.
References


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