

BOOK REVIEW

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Review of *In Pursuit of Progress: Narratives of Development on a Philippine Island* by Hannah C. M. Bulloch

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In Pursuit of Progress: Narratives of Development on a Philippine Island

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press; 2017

228 pages, ISBN: 9780824858865

Keywords: New ethnography of development, Anthropology, Philippines, Morality, Moral economy

Building on current anthropological studies that look at development from a critical and everyday perspective, Hannah Bulloch's monograph *In Pursuit of Progress: Narratives of Development on a Philippine Island* provides an engaging and clever analysis of the ways development is appropriated and articulated in a locality. Bulloch is a research fellow in anthropology at the Australian National University. Her work is based on a decade of engagement (2 years of ethnographic fieldwork and several visits) with Siquijodnons, the Cebuano-speaking people of Siquijor, an island in the Visayas region of the Philippines. Using new ethnography of development as her framework, she emphasizes the agency of Siquijodnons while interrogating their experiences, understandings and practices of development. The book is written as a grounded critique of development and therefore appeals to both scholars and practitioners who seek different ways of approaching and appreciating development as human flourishing both at the collective and personal levels.

At the heart of her inquiry is a notion Siquijodnons associate with development, *kalamboan*, which means material prosperity. By listening to locals and capturing the nuances of the term, Bulloch explains how development as *kalamboan* is intertwined with local ideals of self, standard of living and civic life. Meanings of *kalamboan* in different contexts suggest how it is used as an evaluative framework. Development becomes a discourse of the moral evaluation of self, economic activity and social relations.

Through several ethnographic chapters, the author discusses the meanings of development/*kalamboan* as they intersect with notions of prosperity and modernity, and come

in tension with oppositional and dominant discourses of poverty and backwardness. Bulloch's ethnography is deep, combining self-awareness, evocative story-telling and theoretical insight. She establishes local understandings of development within the fabric of everyday life on the island (Chapter 2). Instead of thinking about Siquijor's context as an isolated place, she highlights its connections with the world through the mobility of Siquijodnons and the consumption practices that it generates. Such assumption allows the author to examine notions of development within a local–global nexus.

Through vignettes of people who typify poverty and prosperity in Siquijor, Bulloch looks closely at the material and social dimensions of *kalamboan*. She finds that both poor and well-off people make relative comparisons of their situations. Nonetheless, she describes the material indicators of poverty and prosperity among Siquijodnons, which are rooted in their relationship to and ownership of land (Chapter 3). Being poor manifests in the lack of basic needs, income and property; while *kalamboan* is evident in consumption and acquisition of modern goods such as foreign brands and concrete houses. At the same time people of Siquijor hold contradictory and equivocal views about *kalamboan*. On one hand, people aspire for consumer goods and modern concrete housing (as opposed to nipa huts); but on the other, they also value simple living and frown upon overt display of wealth (p. 39). Such tension is linked to relations between the poor and well-off in a moral economy based on reciprocity and social obligation. In the rest of the chapters, the author explores how the moral economy of Siquijor competes with the forces of modernization and economic liberalization. In so doing, she makes an argument about the morally contested nature of people's visions of their well-being.

The author uses two instances to demonstrate competing visions of development and notions that construct and position Siquijor as backward. One is how development is compared in relation to an outside other, *Amerika*, a term referring to Western modernity. The other is a local type of comparison in relation to folk beliefs and practices that the island is known for. Among Siquijodnons the United States has come to symbolise modernity and the West. In Chapter 4, Bulloch discusses how *Amerika* acquires symbolic power which becomes a way to differentiate status among locals and activates a sense of inferiority in relation to the West. However, the author goes beyond the superficial meaning of *Amerika*: she finds that locals assign value to Western material goods and way of life (i.e. individualism) but at the same time they cast a critical eye on consumer lifestyles and the inability of people from *Amerika* to feel towards others.

Alongside the standard of *Amerika*, folk beliefs and practices exert a degree of influence among Siquijodnons (Chapter 4). Bulloch tackles the sensitive topic of their belief in supernatural beings that is evident in taking precautions against offending spirits. Relying on second-hand accounts and locals who tend to be evasive about the topic, she manages to ascertain that folk beliefs and practices are considered backward but still discursively useful. Siquijodnons contrast popular belief with modern knowledge to make moral evaluations of people and simultaneously claim to believe that local knowledge is no less superior than the *Amerikanos'* (the West).

The exercise of agency in the way people of Siquijor practice development is adequately discussed in the book. While Bulloch finds that Siquijodnons appropriate discourses of development, they also reinforce inequalities in practice. Chapter 6 analyses the consequences of a foreign-funded participatory project. Echoing dynamics of

development initiatives in other global South contexts, the experience of Siquijor reinforces the notion that efforts to equalize participation in community-level projects may not result in the active involvement of intended parties, especially among economically marginal groups. The long process of a participatory approach takes time away from work for people with subsistence-level incomes. Bulloch's ethnography reveals that jobless women in economically stable households, who have time to participate, are most likely to benefit from such schemes. In Siquijor the presence and completion of development projects, become objects of display for politicians and stakeholders to render development as performance.

In the remaining Chapters (7 and 8), the author explains how development becomes a moral discourse. Chapter 7 sets the stage for this discussion by examining a government-sponsored project in the island province. KALAHICIDSS (Kapit-bisig Laban sa Kahirapan [Linking arms against poverty]-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services) is a program that promotes community participation and cooperation in the identification and implementation of development projects at the village level. In so doing, KALAHICIDSS is an exercise of transparent and accountable governance in which local residents are able to use government funds through a participatory process. Focusing on a water facility project in Balete, the author interrogates how participation and empowerment actually takes place in the context of the program. Participants of the project identified water provision as a problem but the constructed water facility failed because project volunteers overlooked the dwindling sources of water in the area. Bulloch notes that when the project was evaluated, promoters of KALAHICIDSS acknowledged the community's lack of technical expertise. Residents of Balete identified corruption as one of the reasons the project failed. In making sense of the Balete experience, Bulloch points how an attempt to empower a locality through participatory processes turned out to create a moral discourse that shifts accountability to actors rather than institutional arrangements. In so doing Bulloch presents a critique of KALAHICIDSS as a neoliberal project in the guise of development. The next chapter furthers the notion of accountable individuals by describing how development discourse focuses on the evaluation of actions and dispositions through moral frameworks used by locals.

Chapter 8 discusses the moral frameworks that Siquijodnons use to explain inequality, poverty and wealth in their society and in other places (p. 163). They tend to see the state of (under)development in light of moral qualities, i.e. poverty and wealth depends more on hard work and cooperation rather than external forces such as unfair terms of trade in the global economy (p. 170). The author discusses the ethic of cooperation and competition by analysing the dynamic of crab mentality (pulling a person down, a characteristic also evident in Caribbean society) and *pinulitika* (politicised) (p. 186). Drawing on understandings of her informants, Bulloch interprets crab mentality as a critique of envy, unfair competition and lack of cooperation. Aside from attributing underdevelopment to crab mentality, Siquijodnons also point out how corrupt practices such as politicising distribution of resources to favour certain parties hinder the island's development. The author complicates corruption as a practice that needs to be seen in light of the clientelist relations in Siquijodnon society. What emerges from Bulloch's analysis is the idea that responsibility for development lies on moral qualities of a people or self-transformation, a common target of development intervention as exemplified

by KALAHI-CIDDS (Chapter 7). However, she also points out the external factors that structure inequality and poverty on the island and the Philippines at large such as colonialism, comprador capitalism, debt bondage, structural adjustment and unfair terms of trade (p. 186).

In Pursuit of Progress exemplifies an anthropological study of development from the perspective of people. Bulloch is strongest in allowing her ethnography to become the basis of the monograph's theoretical arguments. But the limitations of the author's ethnography generates more questions about equally significant political and economic activities on the island. For instance, what role might local political dynasties play in development projects? Such inquiry can further illustrate the notion of '*pinulitika*' or politicization of projects. Another topic that the ethnography does not sufficiently discuss is the extent to which Siquijodnons compare their situations with other models of development such as Dumaguete, the closest regional city which her informants constantly refer to, Metropolitan Manila (the Philippine capital) and other non-Western host societies (e.g. Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan) where Siquijodnons also work. Tourism as a development practice on the island and foreigners who settle and buy land on Siquijor are also excluded from ethnographic scrutiny. Might an exploration into discourses triggered by locals' interactions with foreigners on the island and comparisons with non-Western places expand the range of moral issues that entail development? The possibility of Siquijor's connections to models of modernity and kalamboan other than Amerika could have been productively explored.

Nevertheless as a new ethnography of development, the book convincingly shows how development is a process of appropriating moral frameworks in the context of a locality's moral economy and politics. It extends previous ethnographic works on Philippine island localities in the Visayas such as Borchgrevink's (2014) investigation of morality and knowledge in a farming community on Bohol island. While validating Borchgrevink's observations about the ethic of cooperation and the interaction between indigenous and scientific knowledge, Bulloch furthers Borchgrevink's analysis by interrogating development as a realm of moral formation and contestation. Indeed, *In Pursuit of Progress* illustrates how development can be critiqued as a moral order of society and re-oriented to be more responsive to the ethical demands of localities and their structural conditions.

Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

Funding

No funding was received for this review.

Publisher's Note

Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Received: 28 July 2017 Accepted: 1 November 2017

Published online: 04 December 2017

Reference

Borchgrevink, A. 2014. *Clean and green: Knowledge and morality in a Philippine Farming Community*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.