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## **The *Komedya* of International Development in Camiguin Island: Ethnographic Stories on Program Impact and Sustainability**

Andrés Narros

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# **The *Komedya* of International Development in Camiguin Island** Ethnographic Stories on Program Impact and Sustainability

There remains a lack of connection between existing standards of international development projects and the social and cultural complexities of rural Philippine communities where these projects are situated.

This article attempts to supply the missing connection by discussing a case study in Camiguin Island in northern Mindanao, where a Spanish government-funded development program took place for fourteen years from 1990 to 2004. This study explores the community's perceptions of the program through an alternative ethnography, using the "archaeological approach" and the traditional play "*komedya*" as metaphor, to understand the correlations among project standards, local complexities, and project impact and sustainability.

**KEYWORDS: DEVELOPMENT · POWER · DISCOURSE · COMMUNITY · PATRON-CLIENT SYSTEM**

The disjuncture between development policy and practice continues to grow. As David Lewis and David Mosse (2006) suggest, current development policy remains characterized by a striking incongruence: given the existing discourse on “evidence” and “results” of projects and project evaluations, people’s practices and responses to aid programs have not been translated to development language. Rosalind Eyben (2013) uncovers the politics of this discourse and argues for a need to widen bureaucratic spaces and go beyond existing standards. The development industry, however, keeps on producing new technical categories and terms, what Cornwall and Brock (2005) call “development buzzwords,” which merely have the reverse effect of narrowing bureaucratic spaces and discourse and increasing the gap between policy and practice.

While analyses of power and structures are useful to understand the way the development industry works, they neglect real-life practices. Norman Long (1989a, 1989b) argues that several structures from different backgrounds, such as development industry practitioners and village people, compete in their encounter of international development, bringing discontinuities to the stage of development, understood here as some form of theater. On these occasions, people have the opportunity to become agents of social change. Hence there is a need to narrate people’s encounter with development programs in the micro arena to cast light on the local social and cultural factors that shape practice, keep track of people and their roles, analyze their perceptions of development plots, and see how they form different communities of interpretation.

Development programs funded by foreign donors deliver health, food security, or livelihood projects to what they call “communities” through different activities that include, among others, workshops and training sessions. Expatriates, development experts, and technical staff come from the “outside,” carrying audiovisual and other equipment; they work and come together to deliver projects, entering villages in cars with fancy stickers that bear logos of government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). During these activities, people from the village watch the “show” and encounter foreign messages such as gender equality, sustainable development, and community participation. Such messages are imparted in different ways, from lecture-style presentations during trainings to “participative” community group discussions and consultations. These activities become a

crucial interface of development. The village people turn into the audience of the “development drama” at this point.

In the earlier history of the Philippines we find a strikingly similar encounter fostered by the *komedya*. The *komedya*, sometimes known as *linambay* or *moro-moro*, was a theatrical performance held in bamboo theaters during the festivities to celebrate a barrio’s patron saint. At times it was performed by travelling groups of actors and at other times by locals from the same village. The *komedya* was based on foreign plots and themes, such as *honor* (honor) and *amor propio* (pride); it featured princes and princesses from exotic kingdoms, surrounded by outlandish stage decor in order to attract the attention of villagers and gather them as audience during these celebrations. As such the *komedya* was probably the main mode of entertainment for Filipinos for almost 400 years. As discussed in this article, the *komedya* can be seen as strengthening feudal values, as providing the opportunity to articulate local meanings, and as domesticating and ritualizing the encounter with the outside (Mojares 1985; Tiongson 1992, 1999, 2012; Tiongson and Obusan 1992; Rafael 1988, 2000, 2005). If these were the effects of the *komedya* in the past through which the people encountered the outside, what could possibly be the impact of the development drama or play in the Philippines today in which people also encounter the outside? What values are reinforced? What sort of community is established?

This article attempts to answer these questions using data from a case study in Camiguin Island, where a Spanish-government-funded development program unfolded over the course of fourteen years, specifically from 1990 to 2004. The study explores village power dynamics and perceptions of two projects under this program through an alternative ethnography, using an “archaeological” approach and the *komedya* as guiding metaphor. It brings to light the hidden practices of the people’s encounter with development and in the process provides an understanding of this encounter within the unique context of Filipino history.

This type of understanding is what ethnographies can offer to development studies. Similar attempts toward this end have been made by anthropologists such as James Ferguson (1990) in Lesotho, Arturo Escobar (1995) in Colombia, and David Mosse (2005) in India. In the Philippines, Lynn Kwiatkowski (1999), Albert Alejo (2000), and Dorothea Hillhorst (2003) have also made interesting contributions to this debate. This article tries to merge these efforts in the search for new narratives that may illumine

what development policies conceal. Without these ethnographies that reconstruct and connect sequences of development practices, the official discourse of development based on the politics of evidence and results will remain unchallenged. This official discourse is a dangerous narrative that portrays people as living in poverty amid malnutrition, food insecurity, and natural disasters, while bypassing fundamental cultural and historical elements. This oversimplistic picture, which perpetuates the existing form of the international development industry in the Philippines, needs to be reversed.

### Village Power Dynamics

In the lowland villages of Camiguin Island various power dynamics are intertwined, which usually remain invisible to the personnel of development projects. Vital social dynamics that shape village life and any external event are hidden beneath the surface.

Kinship remains a fundamental value in a society informed by the horizontal concept of siblingship at the expense of the vertical links based on seniority, filiations, and descent. According to Janet Carsten (1997, 58), this concept is common in bilateral kinship societies in Southeast Asia. Bilateral kinship strengthens horizontal links through the value of siblings, cousins, and horizontal alliances of the same generation, but to the detriment of father–son, superior–inferior, and other hierarchical links. The sibling concept also codes gender relations (Errington 1990, 47). As in many other parts of Southeast Asia, woman and man in Camiguin traditionally complement each other the way a sister and brother would. Together they embody “unity,” the source of social recognition. The kinship system, which goes beyond the household, sets the moral foundations of the village. The material results of these relationships can be observed in the way spaces and places are interconnected in any Philippine barangay.

However, not everything is coded horizontally in the village. In the context of the Philippines’s weak state, patron and client networks become salient. Barangay leaders offer protection in return for support, nonfinancial favors, and votes. Village folk, farmers, fisherfolk, and tricycle drivers get security and well being from their patrons. The village is divided into groups or factions, with different leaders and supporters, constantly negotiating their access to power from within and in between social groups. Other factions, clans, or dynasties at the municipal, provincial, and national levels support

the factions in the village, thus defining the hierarchical links between the barangay, municipality, and province.

As a result, we find significant tensions in the barangay resulting from the combination of these traditional horizontal patterns based on kinship and the hierarchy based on patrons, clients, and factions. Nonetheless, these different social groups are not always at odds with one another. They sometimes win each other over, employ each other to build even more beneficial alliances, or simply find a fair balance in their relationships. All these happen as people maneuver between rank and status, and as factions and clans constantly attempt to become dynasties in order to perpetuate their power. John Sidel (1994, 110) has pointed out that in a Philippine barangay, where political authority is largely not institutionalized and confined, the bilateral kinship system is the major obstacle to the retention of power by any given family across generations.

All these power dynamics are seasoned by *pakiramdam* (feeling for another), *pakikipagkapwa* (shared identity), and *utang na loob* (gratitude) (Enriquez 1992); social values based on reciprocity that link village people in a circle where help and debt circulate and overlap. On the one hand, this circle of exchange in vertical and horizontal relations promises the *loob* (soul) its social protection and well being; on the other hand, reciprocal ties threaten to extinguish the loob when *hiya* (shame) is broken and the person is no longer in the circle of exchange (Rafael 1988).

In the past these social forces shaped the relationship between the datu or traditional leader and the *timawa* (freemen) and *oripun* (slaves) in the precolonial age (Scott 1994) and the relationship between the Spanish friars and the colonized natives in the ensuing centuries (Rafael 1988). At present, Fenella Cannell (1999, 228) claims that “barangay people are greatly concerned with transformation from states of greater hierarchy, distance and asymmetry between persons, to states of greater balance, intimacy and harmony.” Consequently they shaped the relationships not only between patron and client and barangay captain and supporters, but also, argues Cannell (ibid.), between wife and husband, *arbolario* (Bisayan traditional healer) and patient, and, if I may add, the development project and its “beneficiaries.” They also shaped the relationship between the komedya and its audience.

In all these scenes of social negotiation, dressed in different styles of fashion, language is the tool that shapes (and is shaped by) them. As Du Bois

(1987, 10) puts it, “Grammars code best what speakers do most.” Thus the Spain-funded development program in Camiguin will be subjected to a sort of linguistic scrutiny through the analysis of the ambivalence and ambiguity of meanings in the development narrative, on the one hand, and its relation to village power dynamics, on the other.

### Power and Language in the Komedya

As Clifford Geertz (1990) states, power and language perform on the stage. Geertz (ibid., 135) argues that the precolonial Balinese state was an organized spectacle of rituals and ceremonies: “A structure of action, now bloody, now ceremonious . . . to describe [politics] is to describe a constellation of enshrined ideas.” Without drama, the play and the theater, the image of power cannot take form. Both komedya and development programs, as part of everyday politics, are delivered to villages in a very similar fashion.

This study looks at development projects as a performance, an encounter between the local audience and a new and foreign drama. The komedya play is used as a historical metaphor in its three aspects: (a) the drama as it is performed on stage, with a plot and messages; (b) the village power’s engagement with the production and reproduction of the play; and (c) the drama’s effect on the audience, their perceptions and understanding of it, and more intriguingly what they make of it.

The komedya, pioneered by Lope de Vega (one of the main playwrights of the Spanish golden century), was originally a Spanish theater play that represented the values of a feudal society. Kings, dukes, and princes from foreign kingdoms fought against Muslims, delivering on stage European metrical romances in a language replete with Spanish words such as *honra* (honor), *batalla* (battle), *potencia* (strength), *criado* (servant), and *ejercito* (armed forces). For Mojares (1985, 90) the komedya celebrated the conservative values of custom and ceremony in a world that revolved around the axis of obedience to divine and secular authority. This celebration of custom and ceremony served a social function, and it is probably one of the reasons why it has survived for so many years.

Tiongson (1999, 17–27) suggests that the production of the komedya was basically a community project shaped by the village hierarchy of authority. With the blessings of the church and the village patron saint, the entire village was engaged in the production of komedya—from the sponsorship of the *hermanos* (brothers) and *hermanas* (sisters); landlords chosen by the

*comité de festejos* (committee on festivities); the director, who was not an artist but a mediator; to the farmers, who wanted to fulfill their vow to the patron saint by performing as actors or volunteers to cut, clean, and bring the bamboo, or simply watching as a member of the audience. The komedya was a communal endeavor because to survive it depended primarily on the support of the community. All these “community” features show certain similarities to the way patrons are sponsored in village fiesta processions described by Fenella Cannell (1999) or the Passion play described by Fernando Zialcita (1986).

Nevertheless, due to the participation of the village in the play (always as audience and sometimes as actors), the komedya was creatively altered over the years to fulfill psychological and cultural expectations. Tiongson (1999, 35) further notes: “the Komedya’s efficacy as an ideological tool of the establishment should not lead to the impression . . . that the natives simply accepted the colonial messages of the play. . . . Moreover, the native culture invented ways of revalorizing the messages of Komedya within the perspective of the people’s interest and sensibility.” This is the case of Pusong, a jester of some sort, a character who comments on a range of sociopolitical realities, making fun of the pomp, or repeating the lines of royal characters in a mocking tone, actions that connect with the experience of the locals. Steven Patrick Fernandez (2012) similarly points out changes in the timeline (extension) and sequences of the play (variation).<sup>1</sup>

The verses, costumes, music, plot, and untranslated words in the vernacular produced an effect on the language and, therefore, on the way of knowing the world. Rafael (1988, 108) adds,

[t]he Komedya displaces fragments of the foreign into the local. But in doing so, they also dislocate the local, denaturalizing the native speech and rendering it beholden to foreign signs and appearances (imposing a hierarchy of languages and power). Through translation, what comes from the outside is given a place in the inside. And it is this giving place that converts both the outside and the inside into something other than what they were.

Thus a ritual on the encounter of the foreign and the local was established, a process of domesticating what was coming from the outside to the inside. Paradoxically, according to Rafael (1988), these rituals were

the foundations of the later *ilustrado* nationalist movement, because in the end komedya offered, from Benedict Anderson's (1991) perspective, a room to imagine communities, neighborhoods that bridged the inside with the outside.

We have then three different accounts of the effects of the komedya on the Filipino audience that might help understand the impact of a development project in a rural village. First, the komedya may have been useful mainly in establishing the values performed on the stage (Mojares 1985). Second, it may have inspired Filipino talent to create new local meanings out of foreign ones based on their needs and sensitivities (Tiongson 1999). Third, it may have led Filipinos to forge their own identity (Rafael 1988) and imagine their communities (Anderson 1991). With this view of the komedya, we now turn to the development drama as it unfolded in Camiguin Island.

### **Research on the Development Program in Camiguin**

From 1990 to 2004, Camiguin Island was the target of the Spanish Assistance for Integrated Livelihood Program (SAIL) funded by the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development (AECID). This program was meant to reduce poverty through the improvement of basic services and productivity among those belonging to the most vulnerable 30 percent population of the island (Secretaría de Estado para la Cooperación Internacional y para Iberoamérica 2000). The program's funding amounted to around EUR 8 million (Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores España 2001).

To achieve its goal, the program constructed several stretches of roads and a water supply system through the local government units (LGUs); it formed cooperatives in the twenty "most vulnerable" barangays to offer microcredit for livelihood activities. The SAIL Foundation was created to implement these livelihood/microcredit projects. The Camiguin Integrated Water System Cooperative (CIWASCO) started its operations to manage the new water system on the island. Both the SAIL Foundation and the CIWASCO were appended to LGUs.

In addition, the program worked in partnership with Filipino and Spanish NGOs in order to engage directly and "empower" the poorest on the island. Together they implemented several sustainable development projects based on ecotourism and microcredit, which tried to promote income-generating activities while protecting the natural environment through reforestation activities and community organizing.

Barangay San Pedro was a major recipient of the SAIL program, which provided a water system with tanks, pipes, and points of water supply for most of the households of the village, as well as ecotourism activities (mainly homestays, souvenir store, tourist guides) managed by a village cooperative.

With the program ending in 2004, I decided to examine its effects several years later. The research on which this article is based explored the ways in which the Spain-funded development program on Camiguin Island engaged with the social and cultural complexities of rural villages. The research sought answers to the following questions:

- How do people of a specific village appropriate the meanings and plots of the development play once it is over?
- What is the role of the traditional power dynamics in this process?
- How does the contextual sense implicit in the Bisayan-Cebuano language relate to the power dynamics in the village?

The study was focused on Barangay San Pedro, where ethnography was conducted continuously between September 2011 and January 2013, seven years after the end of the SAIL program. Examining the "remnants" of the program lent the study its "archaeological" approach. To establish rapport with the people in the village of San Pedro, I decided to work as a volunteer, first by helping one of the carpenters (for one month), and then by teaching music in the 2012 summer camp (for two months). Once the people became familiar with me and vice versa, data gathering commenced. Twenty-three in-depth interviews were carried out with people in San Pedro. Another twenty in-depth interviews took place with the program staff (Filipino and Spanish) in Camiguin and Manila, and through the Internet. Seven focus group discussions, with five participants each, were conducted in the village.

Finally, two forum theaters took place with the help of Rossalie Zerrudo, a Filipina artist and psychologist, who facilitated one forum theater on local politics and development in August 2012, and a second on cognitive anthropology and language in January 2013.<sup>2</sup> On top of all these methods, months of participant observation, informal talks and gatherings, as well as karaoke sessions or fiesta meals helped me understand and contextualize what I had gathered through interviews and group discussions. The Anthropology Department of the University of the Philippines, to which I was affiliated,



always offered me support and sincere interest in discussing emerging issues and topics.

### **Barangay San Pedro**

To a visitor's eyes, San Pedro is just another normal lowland Philippine barangay on the beautiful island of Camiguin.<sup>3</sup> At least this was what I felt the first time I visited the village in October 2011. It is located on the hillside of the Hibok-Hibok Volcano, the youngest and only active volcano on the island. The barangay, one of the biggest and more populated in Camiguin, is well spread out over several barrios. In the plaza one finds the school, the classic multipurpose court with its stage, the houses of the wealthier families, and of course the church. There are also a few small *sari-sari* (convenience) stores in the area.

Down the plaza are some barangay facilities, near where the barangay captain's house stands. The new covered court and day-care center stand in front of each other. Following the same road but toward the hill, one can find the health center, and a very small barangay hall with its tiny prison. That is where my first meeting with the barangay captain and *kagawad* (village council members) took place. In the late afternoons and early evenings, the visitor will hear music from karaokes from each corner of the village. Karaokes are the main entertainment activity in San Pedro.<sup>4</sup>

According to the data provided by the secretary of the village council, there are 1,600 people in San Pedro, living in around 335 households (i.e., almost five persons per household). People mainly grow coconut, corn, and vegetables, but cash incomes rely heavily on the sale of coconuts for the production of oil. The prices of coconuts are constantly on the decline, keeping the village in periods of crisis year after year. According to San Pedro farmers, the price of one kilo of coconut is P7 today, whereas it was P18 twenty years ago.<sup>5</sup>

Some coconut farmers have their own small plots of land where they cultivate vegetables for their own consumption, while a few have bigger properties and hire agricultural workers. Income from the coconut harvest is distributed following *nilima*, that is, three coconuts for the owner and two for the worker. Some farmers are tenants of small lands, while others have very sophisticated agreements with small landowners to use the land but not to own it. Some people in San Pedro also work as providers of basic services as fish or cake vendors, tricycle drivers, and mechanics, or have little stores to

augment the low income from selling coconuts. The more fortunate in the village work as teachers in the school, social workers in national government programs, or as midwives in the local health center. All these economic difficulties (*kalisúd* in Bisaya) strengthen the patron–client system in San Pedro from which people receive security and protection.

My presence always boosted the curiosity and expectations of the people in San Pedro. I was made to feel that a Spaniard's presence there meant there was a chance for a new project to be implemented in their barangay. They were always open to chat with me, host me, guide me, and of course laugh with me. Others, however, perceived me as “a spy, like in the old days,” as Kan, my friend and informant, told me in one of the forum theaters carried out during my stay in the village. It was part of my daily duty to clarify my purpose and work hard to avoid disappointments as a result of wrong expectations. I believe my words were not enough.

After making the proper presentations with barangay officials, I started my research by walking around the village in search of signs or traces of the SAIL program that could still be found. The water tanks, water pipes, and meters had been a central part of the village life. The water system had been a permanent topic of discussion. In fact, during my very first meeting with the barangay council, the first thing they asked after I introduced myself and my purpose was, “Could you help bring us back our water management system?” I did not understand exactly what they meant. It took me some time to grasp the fight over water in the village.

On the upper side of the village, next to the house of the chairman, the cooperative *Komunidad* (“community”) still operates a small store, selling rice, corn, eggs, and a few other basic necessities. To an outsider, the cooperative store seems like a badly injured surviving sign of the SAIL program.

Beyond these tangible outputs of the SAIL program, like an explorer I was forced to initiate some sort of archaeology to follow the traces left by the program. There was no sign of any ecotourism activity once held in the village. The handicraft workshops, souvenir store, ecotourism guides, and tourists were all gone. A good example of the challenge I was taking was the way I found the souvenir store when I arrived. In front of the *Komunidad* store was a pile of ruins of a bamboo and concrete structure, something that must have been beautiful when it existed. The ruins were not caused by a storm or an earthquake, but by neglect. On what used

to be the floor I saw the blurred and rusty logo of the Spanish funding agency, AECID.

The program and its spirit left the village sometime before my arrival. The main goal of my field study was to reconstruct and connect the sequences of what people of San Pedro made out of the SAIL. What messages were represented in San Pedro during the SAIL performance? What role did the patron–client system play when the show was over? What did the audience finally perceive from the drama, and how did they perceive it? It is time to answer these questions.

### **SAIL on the Stage: The Plot and Messages of Development**

Ironically, like the komedya, the SAIL program had bonds with the colonial period. According to the former governor of Camiguin, in 1988 Mita Pardo de Tavera, social welfare secretary of the Corazon Aquino administration who had strong Spanish ties, reportedly invited the Spanish ambassador to the Philippines to visit the island of Camiguin. The island's governor at that time prepared a reception to honor the ambassador. According to my informant, all the Spanish mestizos of the island were invited and together with the ambassador they visited the ruins of the Spanish church in Bon-Bon. As the former governor shared, "We wanted to make him feel that Spain was our Mother Country." At this point the governor asked the ambassador for livelihood assistance.

In 1990 SAIL was approved and funded (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain 2001). The original "script" of the SAIL program, as mentioned earlier, was to improve the quality of life of the most vulnerable among the island's population. The integrated water system and the ecotourism project (the former built with a provincial cooperative, the latter with a local) were the main projects delivered in San Pedro.

To introduce the SAIL program in the barangay and enable the people to implement it, dozens of workshops and trainings were performed in the barangay hall, the church, the plaza, and sometimes even in Mambajao, the provincial capital. The shining logos of the foreign and local agencies sponsoring the show were always dominating. On stage, after singing the national anthem and saying a prayer, local and foreign actors from the Spanish and Filipino NGOs, LGUs, and the AECID played their part in delivering the plot of the SAIL program. The themes were about leadership,

management, sustainable agriculture, health, tour operations, tourist management, food preparation, homestay development, and others. The language was Bisayan, but the plot was full of English buzzwords from the development discourse. Words such as "community participation," "sustainable development," "poverty reduction," "people empowerment," and "gender equality" began to be uttered in San Pedro. At the end of a workshop, reading materials would be distributed among the audience. According to the director of the Philippine NGO, in some years an average of one presentation was performed each month. The audience—village leaders and the people—would attend these shows from one to three days; they were provided snacks, meals, and transportation.

Sometime in 2000, Her Majesty Queen Sofia of Spain came to the island of Camiguin to perform not in the komedya but in the SAIL program. The queen launched the third phase of SAIL and visited some project sites where she addressed the village people and SAIL beneficiaries. At a symbolic level, the royal visit completed the picture of the komedya. Unfortunately, that visit was understood locally as support and legitimation for the way patrons were implementing the program.

### **Translating Messages of SAIL: Brokers of Development**

The water system can be considered the major contribution of the SAIL program in the village of San Pedro. After a long period of construction of the water facilities (tanks, pipes, water meters), today most people have water in their houses, paying a very low fee and enjoying good maintenance. Before the installation of the system, water was obtained through pipes from a local spring. But it was an issue that mirrored the barangay feuds. According to most of my informants, those who belonged to the captain's clan had better pipes and better access to water than those who were not part of his clan. Supporters or leaders of other clans did not enjoy the same service. Oddly enough, in the personal collection of Vicente Elio, a contemporary of José Rizal at the Ateneo de Manila and *Juez de Paz* (Justice of the Peace) during the last decade of the nineteenth century in Camiguin Island, a letter reveals similar feuds in the past.<sup>6</sup> The SAIL program came to resolve this water controversy, first by providing water to households; and, second, by providing equal access to water regardless of political affiliation. There was water in the village health center, the day-care center, and the school. All these changes had a significant impact on people's lives.



However, some issues concerning water management surfaced when I started to work in the village. The CIWASCO, the water cooperative created to manage the water system in the island to ensure its sustainability, did not start to operate in San Pedro until 2010. From 2004, when the installation was finished, to 2010, the barangay council handled water management and the collection of the fee amounting to P10 per month. A vast number of village people (except the captain) complained about the water system management. Rodolfo, an old and gentle farmer, told me that “there was even cutting of the water [service] during fiesta.” Water flow was poor, always with ups and downs, and the maintenance service provided by the barangay, especially to repair damages from storms, was slow and insufficient. They asked for *pahina* (from Spanish *página*, page), a kind of volunteer work, to repair the system. People at that time were wondering about the purpose of their fees. Rodolfo and others believed the fee was used for other purposes. The water system was functioning well for some, but not for all.

Political alliances were the key factor when it came to accessing water. Some informants said there was a tacit agreement between the barangay captain and higher officials in the province to keep the management of the water system in the barangay for as long as the system could use water from the village spring. The barangay council earned some extra income and, more importantly, used the SAIL water facilities to “empower” itself. The SAIL program increased the barangay captain’s capacity to offer work and “protection” to his supporters through the construction of water tanks, channels, and pipes; the management of the water system fee; and other related activities. At the same time, he neglected and weakened other patron–client factions in the village.

Evidently traditional power dynamics were strengthened by and benefited the water project in San Pedro. In other words, the vertical power dynamics based on the patron–client system became stronger after the SAIL program was introduced. In fact, the same barangay captain’s family had been ruling San Pedro during the last thirteen years. Their political power and influence in the village had been so strong that the barangay captain’s wife (an outsider to the village) was able to run for the same position to replace her husband in the last elections; the family’s supporters voted for her and delivered a victory. The family’s links with higher officials in the island also seemed steady. Such partnership kept on bringing construction projects and work to the villagers, or better yet to those close to the center of power.

Nonetheless, political alliances within the barangay had not remained static, and links with the municipality and the provincial capital had been changing. After complaints by San Pedro inhabitants about the quality of service were brought to the attention of higher provincial officers, the door was opened to the CIWASCO to finally take over and manage the water system in San Pedro in 2010. From then on, according to the vast majority of the people, the system improved and provided water to everyone regardless of political affiliation.

Interestingly, in my interview with the former barangay captain in July 2012 when I asked him about his major contributions and achievements during his thirteen years as the village political leader, he did not mention the water system. It seemed as if the main event that brought about social change in the village during the last twenty years had nothing to do with its captain.

It will be recalled that in its original “script,” the SAIL program was meant for the poorest inhabitants. However, according to the barangay council of San Pedro and my own observations, about 15 percent of households were not provided with access to water because of their lack of financial capacity to afford the installation costs and monthly payments. Living in the high hills and remote areas, these households were the most vulnerable in the village. (In Camiguin as in other parts of the country, people living in the uplands are the least schooled, generate the lowest incomes, and receive less in government services.) It should be noted also that the water system, not only in San Pedro but also in the whole island, could not provide water to houses located above 70 meters from the ground level, since the system, with its tight budget, could not afford water pumps. It was a gravity-operated system (Provincial Government of Camiguin 2004). Still, the gaps of the program seemed to hit the most vulnerable of the population.

Compared with other projects in San Pedro, however, the water project was sustained because of the strength of the institutional bodies in charge of the program, such as the provincial government, the barangay captain, and the CIWASCO. However, the original intentions of the project were transformed to fit into the LGUs’ agenda, interest, or capacity.

As Mosse and Lewis (2006) have suggested, the barangay captain and other patrons in the village and the province became “brokers” of the SAIL program, negotiating and translating its messages and meanings into the language of the village. Could the SAIL development drama be a tool to uplift their status and power in the village?

The NGOs' ecotourism project made an enormous effort in organizing the village beyond the traditional network of the barangay captain, strengthening civic organizations as an alternative model to approach and engage the poorest in San Pedro. For this purpose they created the local cooperative *Komunidad*. (The actual name of this cooperative was given not by the village people but by a community organizer connected with a Filipino NGO.) Little by little, a few powerful families who were not included in the barangay captain's clan embraced the new cooperative. The Rodriguez, Bautista, Sanchez, and Rosales families (not their real names) were building a new center of gravity in the village. They were the ones who attended the workshops and trainings; who learned about "community" management and leadership; and dealt with the cooperative's incomes, the food store, souvenir store, homestays, and guide operators. At the outset, they created rapport and trust in the village and with the NGOs. The head of the Spanish NGO told me without hesitation that the cooperative *Komunidad* was the more enthusiastic and active organization among all those in the villages of the island.

But that was not the view of the people of San Pedro years later. To start with, the community organizer in San Pedro during the time when *Komunidad* was created reminisced about the vote-buying incident during the cooperative's first election. In one of the forum theaters held during my fieldwork, the participants (people from the most remote areas of the village, some of whom did not benefit from the water system) were asked about their views of *Komunidad*. They said, "*Kuot-Coop*." I did not understand what they were trying to say, but my assistant explained that "*kuot*" in Bisaya means to take away, remove, or withdraw. *Komunidad* shifted its meaning from "community spirit" to "commission of theft."

According to most informants, only the board members of *Komunidad* and their "men" benefited from the credits and loans offered by the SAIL program. During the cooperative's lifetime, the board members and the chairman remained unchanged (thanks to the support of the latter's many relatives in the barrios located on the mountain). The same people occupied the same positions. They were leaders of the village who upheld the patron and client's support, protection, help, and debt circles. As a result, the seven rooms for homestays were built in the houses of these new powerful families. They became brokers who translated the project concepts to local meanings and interests.<sup>7</sup>

The number of *Komunidad* members and their active roles diminished over the last years of the project, even as annoyance with the cooperative increased in the village. Today the cooperative seems like an old "community" ghost in which only the members and chairman of the board do not accept its failure. Unforgettable was the time I met the secretary and president of the cooperative in Mambajao, the capital of the province. They were in the plaza, holding some wrinkled papers and documents in their hands, acting clumsy and nervous. They told me they were searching for some funding to cultivate the nito vine (again) as raw material to produce (again) local handicrafts.

The NGOs were sponsoring "community participation" but their management style was very centralized. In the Philippines NGOs are well known for becoming new patrons to the peasants they assist.<sup>8</sup> The rooms for homestays, souvenir store, and guide operations were patronized by the Filipino NGO. As already mentioned, they implemented many training programs, workshops, and consultations to enable the village to deal with tourism. However, it was actually the marketing department of this NGO in Manila that handled the marketing component of those projects. In other words, the NGOs themselves were dealing with the tourists. According to my informants from the Spanish NGO, sometime in 2003, this marketing department was closed due to budget problems, leaving the barangay people, their capacity, and new structures without clients. However, the way the closure was explained to members of the cooperative was totally different. The secretary of the cooperative, who was concurrently secretary of the barangay council, informed me that "the NGO told us that the reason why tourists don't come anymore to the villages is because of the increase of rebel kidnapping and murders in Mindanao."

Nevertheless, by the time the NGOs were phased out of San Pedro, almost all ecotourism activities had disappeared or had not been sustained. Naida, a wise old woman with whom I lived for several months, told me, "They (the Filipino NGO) were dealing with the tourists and distributed them among our homestays. But they did not teach us how to approach and engage with our clients, the tourists. After that, they left in silence and left us alone."

Again, families who were poorer than other villagers were not reached by the ecotourism project and its cooperative. This observation was confirmed when I went to the upper side of the barangay, where families had little to

do with the cooperative or even with the water supply system. Ironically, the original script of the play was written explicitly for them. SAIL for them was nothing more than a disappointment, especially with the way village leaders carved out the program.

### The Audience's Perceptions of SAIL

Naida, Rodolfo, and Kan attended the SAIL trainings and workshops for many years. The leaders of the Rodriguez, Bautista, Sanchez, and Rosales families did as well. Led by the captain and his wife, they all were there as audience. Workshop after workshop, year after year, they listened and encountered those development buzzwords uttered on the stage, and likewise formed new meanings, filling them out in turn with local understandings.

Their perceptions could have been based on their position in the circles of debt and help in the village, but these could also be traced to the local language. The ambivalence of certain Bisayan words might be a representation of these perceptions. Depending on one's position, *negosio* (business) can mean not only benefit but also debt. Similarly *soborno* (bribery) can assume positive or negative connotations depending on which side one takes.<sup>9</sup> Similarly "community," "poverty," and "development project" have acquired different meanings in the village. In most cases, these perceptions have differed fundamentally from the "official script." During the last part of my fieldwork in San Pedro, I explored through forum theaters, focus group interviews, and group discussions this sociocognitive side of the play, the world of perceptions and recreations of meaning.

"Poverty" is probably the most used word in the SAIL performance. As we have seen, it is the core of the program's main objectives. It is seen by the SAIL discourse as a social status resulting from the combination of material and objective quantitative indicators (based mainly on incomes and access to government services). However, local leaders in San Pedro associate poverty with nonmaterial social dimensions. For them poverty is the result of lack of initiative and laziness. They see people as simply waiting for their leaders to solve their situation. They use the same English term to define a "dole-out mentality."

Meanwhile, the poor in the village see their poverty as a subjective phenomenon in which feelings, such as *hiya* and the reaction of village folk, are very important. In the Bisayan tradition, *kalisúd* (difficulty, adversity) and *pag-antus* (suffering) have double-edged meanings: while these words

can refer to a situation of extreme marginality, they can also call for pity (in order to activate the circles of reciprocity, help, and support). Finally, village people do not think of poverty as a social status but as a temporal situation, perhaps due to their experience with social rank mobility.

When poverty reduction came across on the SAIL stage, village leaders probably expected the poor to take more initiative, while the poor were waiting for their leaders to be more caring and to distribute profits more equally (based on old patterns of reciprocity). In one of the forum theaters held during my fieldwork, we carried out an activity in which the participants had to answer my questions by merely crossing a circle. At one point I asked, "Who believes that progress/development comes from government?" All, except Kan, crossed the circle. In other words, the participants expected government to reduce poverty in the village.

Another very popular term on the SAIL stage was "development project." For development experts working for SAIL, a project represented a means to reduce poverty and achieve *kalamnan* (progress or development in Bisaya). However, in the village, local leaders (the barangay captain and barangay leaders, provincial officers) saw those projects as opportunities to provide work to "their" people (i.e., their clan supporters). Therefore, the construction of the water system and the building of the rooms for homestays or the souvenir store were seen largely as opportunities to provide work. In one of the forum theaters, we asked the participants to draw a sort of association map, and indeed they equated "development project" with *trabaho* (work in Bisaya). For their part, village people perceived "development projects" as opportunities to gain access to work. To get work they needed to be strategic. Therefore, each "beneficiary" had his or her own project within the project. As they said, "*dile makatrabaho kay walay backer*" (you cannot find work if you don't have a sponsor).

In another of the forum theaters, we implemented an activity called "fears and protectors." Each participant had to choose a person to protect as well as a protector. After they made their choices, they had to explain their reasons. All the participants wanted to protect the same person, Corazón, an old woman who, despite being alone, always smiled while coping with major social tragedies. Her husband died years ago, and her sons, living away, did not support her financially. When it came to choosing protectors, Aba told us next: "I know who my threats are. My protector is the person who can talk

and mediate with them. They are the ones who could fix a talk or chat with our enemies. Our protectors are the center.”

In another activity based on role playing, the scene involved the governor of the province, the mayor of the municipality, and the barangay captain of San Pedro discussing policy and budget priorities. Specifically, the debate was about how to promote San Pedro fiesta activities or support a new farming activity in the village. Once the role-playing activity was over, we asked the participants to take part in the discussion. The participants had to approach the leaders and share their opinions and views. At this particular moment, something happened that called my attention. Dani, one of the participants, was against the governor’s views. Instead of directly addressing the governor (portrayed by myself), he whispered to the barangay captain’s ears and asked him to pass the message to me. In my view, Dani’s scene was crucial. First, he was hiding himself as agent of the action under the shadow of the captain. Second, while hiding his role, he did not neglect the message and its effect. (He was not at any point careless. In fact, the effect of the message might have a bigger impact on the governor when coming from the captain instead of himself.) In my view, Dani had staged the patron–client system brilliantly.

“Community” was a third development buzzword on the SAIL stage. For development experts, community was understood as referring to a social unit with social horizontal links, solidarity, and common interest. They associated it with the smallest social unit in the development industry; it was solid and indivisible. For village leaders, poor people lived in a community. (In contrast, wealthy people lived in a different kind of settlement like condominiums.) But ordinary people perceived it differently as they pointed out the existence of conflict within the community, *tao–tao* politics (nepotism), corruption, and lack of hope. There were, of course, more idealistic meanings of “community” such as *panaghigubna* (companionship) or *panaghiusa* (solidarity, unity), but these meanings did not emerge when people talked about development in the village. I asked whether San Pedro was a solid community during one of the forum theaters; only one participant agreed.

During an informal chat with the barangay captain and one of the kagawad (councilors), I heard them saying “pan pan vino vino” (bread bread wine wine).<sup>10</sup> Intrigued, I asked them about the meaning of this phrase. The captain, with a tone of voice that reflected a sort of inconvenience, told me the expression refers to the group of people who support a political leader.

When I brought up the same question to the people, the captain’s supporters, they gave a different reply. For them it referred to the drinks and gifts that leaders offer to supporters during election campaigns.

One finds a sort of dissonance going all along these different perceptions of the same basic concepts of the SAIL program—as if SAIL were like the local language, where meanings are context based, in which a given word embraces a sort of continuum or ambivalence (never broken) where different and even opposite meanings comfortably fit together. Meaning is based on the social position where the speaker puts its own “accent.” It is as if SAIL were the local grammar, with a sort of tendency to denote the role of the agent and focus on the effects on the patient (recall Dani’s performance), where there is a structural continuum from the active to the passive (Tanangkingsing and Huang 2007). This grammar has a unique case-marking, for the object of a transitive clause and the subject of an intransitive are treated alike (Dita 2010), a feature that makes it difficult to discern them. It seems the local language and its grammar offer the perfect space to host and conceal the patron–client system.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

“Kung unsakata as sa prosisyon mubalik gyod na sa simbahan” (A procession, no matter how long, always leads back to the church).

Going with how the people in the village think, things go and then come back again. Many years ago, the encounter of komedya was taken by the power dynamics of the village and carved by audience perceptions. Later the audience subverted their meanings into something else.

The SAIL development program and the komedya can be seen as very similar in three aspects of the metaphor: (a) foreign plots unfolding on stage; (b) patrons engaging with it off stage; and (c) village people forming perceptions and what they made of them. Both the SAIL program and the komedya intended to convince the villagers that a “new order” was going to emerge and, in doing so, both were able to enlist the patrons and villagers as participants. Village patrons became sponsors of komedya and SAIL, and they too became brokers and translators of the plot’s meanings. The changing roles produced a significant shift from the original scripts of the play.

But ironically the komedya and the SAIL program both generated the reverse effect of what they were intended to accomplish. On the one hand, the komedya was known to be a drama that was later subverted and,

according to Rafael (2000, 2005), sent coded anti-Spanish messages. The audience, the object of the show, later became the agent in imagining the Filipino community. On the other hand, the SAIL program claimed to offer real change; it intended to create more equality while reducing poverty in San Pedro. However, it seems to have confirmed and reinforced existing local hierarchies. In this regard, SAIL was a participatory spectacle, which however was not really integrated into the people's daily lives.

The SAIL drama was more disappointing because people had hoped that it might lead to real change. That explains why I found numerous words and silences of disappointment and anger from people with the way patrons carved the SAIL program in the village. But I believe these words of anger connote development. More importantly, this anger may be the driver of an interesting shift for as long as it is addressed through the horizontal social channels in the village. The SAIL program might have nurtured this possibility. The shift in the water management from the barangay council of San Pedro (patron and client) to the CIWASCO (provincial cooperative managed by its equal members with same rights and obligations) represents that key shift very well.

In the end, this is what the komedya did. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the komedya made some interesting shifts, such as challenging the old plots and their social and political foundations: "Focusing on the social conflicts generated by the proscribed love of Christians for Muslims, komedya took up the themes of transgressive desire, filial betrayal, the crisis of parental authority, and by extension, the unmaking and remaking of the bonds of reciprocity on which such authority was based" (Rafael 2000, 42). Again, people were able to move from a passive role (as the object, the audience) to that of an active agent (in remaking new meanings). We also know that Philippine history is full of stories of subtle conversions. Ito (1979, 8–120) has taught us that, through the *pasyon* (whose predecessor could have been the religious komedya), the values of siblingship, *pakikipagkapwa* (shared identity), and horizontal reciprocity, the meanings of the colonial plot were converted and transformed into the Katipunan revolution.

## Postscript

As I write this conclusion, millions of dollars from international donors are being deployed to the Visayan region and Palawan in response to the needs of the victims of Typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan. Hundreds of foreign NGOs

with numerous expatriates and experts are already working on long-term rehabilitation, trying to help hundreds of thousands of Filipinos. Therefore, hundreds of workshops, trainings, and consultations are taking place in rural barangays in these provinces. But I wonder how many people in Yolanda-affected areas are going to feel what people in San Pedro do today. Will they be able to subvert that anger? What could be the role of the old horizontal links and values? Development projects and evaluations should keep track of these questions, but to do so, to avoid being blind and to finally understand people's responses to their programs, they need first to change their lens.

## Notes

- 1 The interviews with Steven Patrick Fernandez and Nicanor G. Tiongson (2011) were made possible with the help of Julie and Kiri Lluch, distant relatives and close friends.
- 2 Forum theater is a type of theater created by the innovative and influential practitioner Augusto Boal as part of what he calls "Theatre of the Oppressed" based on simultaneous dramaturgy. In this process, the actors or audience members can stop a performance, often a short scene in which a character is being oppressed in some way. The audience can suggest different courses of actions for the actors to carry out onstage to change the outcome of what they are watching. This strategy attempts to undo the traditional actor partition and bring audience members into the performance.
- 3 The names of the village, San Pedro; the cooperative, Komunidad; and all the informants—Rodolfo, Corazón, Dani, and the Rodriguez, Bautista, Sanchez, and Bajuyo families—are all fictitious.
- 4 In my view karaoke represents another encounter between music (mainly foreign but also local), images (videos of the National Basketball Association [NBA], "western" cities, or sexy girls), and the local interpreter.
- 5 According to the LGU of Camiguin, coconut production has increased in the island 4 percent (for the period 2006–2008), while prices of copra have decreased 45 percent (2008–2009).
- 6 The Vicente Elio Collection is found in the Folklife Museum and Archive of Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro. For a description and background of this collection, see Francisco Demetrio's introduction to Elio y Sanchez's (1972) article. According to the museum staff, since the collection was donated to the university, only Demetrio and myself have consulted the archive. I thank the staff of the museum and Xavier University for their help and kindness.
- 7 I am reminded of the story of Pilandok and the Crocodiles. In brief the story revolves around Pilandok, a mouse deer who has a strange relationship with crocodiles, whom he is able to fool for his own benefit. Whenever he needs the collaboration of the powerful crocodiles, Pilandok cheats them one after the other. Pilandok could be any Filipino, powerless yet clever. He uses tricks as his main tool in challenging authority. But his cleverness is also his weakness. He walks away laughing at the success of his pranks, but seems to have no self-reflection and



understanding of his own power. Quindoza-Santiago (2011) discusses the Pilandok narrative and its correlations with local politics. See the Pilandok narrative as told by Añonuevo 2011.

- 8 That was my own experience while working in an international NGO in Vigan, Ilocos Sur, from 2000 to 2003. The final evaluation of the NGO project showed that it created dependency among its beneficiaries and stakeholders.
- 9 *Negocio* in Spanish language only refers to the process of making business. *Soborno* in Spanish refers only to bribery. During one of the forum theatres in San Pedro when participants were asked about *soborno*, they mentioned *datung* (bribe) but also *hinabang* (help or support). When participants were asked about *negosio*, they mentioned *sari-sari* store (small variety store) but also *putang* (cash loan).
- 10 The Spanish expression *al pan pan y al vino, vino* refers to a notion of reality in which things are called what they are. In Bisaya-Cebuano it refers to political filiations.
- 11 I discuss extensively the compatibility between the cognitive foundations of Bisaya-Cebuano grammar and the patron–client social system in my doctoral thesis. Here I just want to point out the potential similarities.

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**Andrés Narros** is doctoral candidate in social anthropology, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), Paseo Senda del Rey, 7, 28040, Madrid, Spain. He has conducted fieldwork as development practitioner and field researcher in the Philippines as well as in Malawi, Iran, Chile, Guatemala, and Spain for fourteen years. He is interested in the interaction between international development project standards and the world of local, cultural, and social complexities, such as kinship, traditional power, gender, local knowledge, and language. <anarros@hotmail.com>