



A moral atmosphere of development as a share: Consequences for urban development in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Corruption is a social preoccupation in Indonesia, receiving as much attention in the media as it does in journals such as *World Development*. The consequences of this preoccupation have escaped the attention of scholars however, a lacuna that this article addresses. Through ethnographic research of sites of state-led welfare and community driven development in Medan, Indonesia, I trace the emergence of a moral logic characterised by *bagi-bagi*, or development as a share. National anti-corruption discourses, lived experiences of petty corruption, and the failures of development projects to bring meaningful benefits encourage various stakeholders to manoeuvre to get a share, or take their part from the resources that flow from the state. The impact of this logic exceed its practices, however. I advance the concept of *moral atmosphere* to reveal the emotional and affective consequences, the ways the ever-present possibility of *bagi-bagi* permeates development encounters and marks individuals as objects of suspicion. Through the empirical material, I demonstrate the ways the moral atmosphere of *bagi-bagi* influences subjectivities, social relations, and the distribution of resources, and hence the importance of examining it as an element of the development arena.

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1. Introduction

“*Bagi-bagi*”, said an elderly woman with a smile as I approached her with a clipboard in hand, soliciting me playfully to give her a share of whatever I was offering. “*Bagi-bagi*” was the demand of a government official asked to sign documents so funds sanctioned for an infrastructure project could be released. Development as a share, *bagi*, or something which is distributed/shared, *bagi-bagi*, has emerged as a moral logic shaping development in Medan, Indonesia. *Bagi-bagi* refers to the sharing of resources that flow from the state and other development activities, and the way people are expected or assumed to ‘take their part’. Citizens, or *warga*, manoeuvre to receive their share by becoming a *penerima manfaat* (recipient of benefits), while ‘developers’ (officials, contractors, volunteers) are expected to skim a share of the funding that passes through them. *Bagi-bagi* denotes less the unwritten norms and values that shape behaviour, but is rather a social preoccupation that envelopes and permeates people’s orientation towards development. In this article I examine *bagi-bagi* as a contemporary moral logic framing state-led development in Medan, and the ways it

reflects, reproduces and is drawn upon to resist unequal social relations (Harrison, 2006; Shah, 2009).

Bagi-bagi shares a “family resemblance”, a certain relation of affinity with ‘corruption’-type practices” (Olivier de Sardan, 1999, p. 26). Anthropologists have pointed to the need for contextualised understandings of diverse practices that are often grouped under ‘corruption’, but which exceed conventional definitions of “the abuse of public office for private gain” (Gupta, 1995; Harrison, 2006, 2007; Smith, 2007; Tidey, 2013). This literature reveals how different moral logics, that is the “normative configurations which influence actors’ strategies” (Olivier de Sardan, 1999, p. 44), shape the legitimacy and moral acceptability of acts that are otherwise pathologized in anti-corruption discourses. Moral logics such as *bagi-bagi* are embedded within local moral economies: the ways values and norms shape economic practices (Olivier de Sardan, 1999). Moral economies are part of the “ambiguous logics and values that guide and sustain livelihood practices”, thereby shaping class relations, access to resources, and social hierarchies (Palomera & Vetta, 2016, p. 415). Attention to moral logics can thereby shed light on the persistence of practices labelled as corrupt, not in order to excuse such practices as ‘gift-giving’, but to reveal power relations, social norms and values that determine the form and outcome of development interventions (Arerkar, Joshi, & Fordham, 2016; Harrison, 2006; Shah, 2009; Tidey, 2013).

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Qualitative research into the moral logics associated with corruption, advances literature that seeks to understand its causes and impacts. A largely quantitative body of work has advanced understandings of the determinants of corruption (Goel & Nelson, 2010; Iwasaki & Suzuki, 2012), including interrogating the relationship between the prevalence of corruption with democratic practices, the media (Bhattacharyya & Hodler, 2015; Dutta & Roy, 2016; Jetter, Agudelo, & Hassan, 2015; Lessmann & Markwardt, 2009; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013) and foreign aid (Okada & Samreth, 2012). Other studies examine its impacts, particularly the consequences for economic growth and prosperity (Bentzen, 2012; D'Agostino, Paul Dunne, & Pieroni, 2016; de Vaal & Ebben, 2011; Huang, 2016; Vial & Hanoteau, 2010) poverty (Justesen & Bjørnskov, 2014), inequality (Dobson & Ramlogan-Dobson, 2012; Mandal & Marjit, 2010) democracy (Stockemer, LaMontagne, & Scruggs, 2011) and public debt (Cooray, Dzhumashev, & Schneider, 2017) institutional and governmental efficiency (Méon & Weill, 2010; Montes & Paschoal, 2016) among others. A further group of studies examine the success or otherwise of reforms and initiatives to address or reduce corruption, particularly those related to decentralisation (Lessmann & Markwardt, 2009) participatory governance (Speer, 2012), e-governance (Elbahasawy, 2014), and other transparency and accountability initiatives (Gaventa & McGee, 2013). What attention to the moral logics of corruption brings to this literature are alternative explanations as to why corrupt practices persist (Arerkar et al., 2016; Smith, 2007; Treux, 2011), insight as to how practices labelled as corruption sustain social relations and social worlds (Olivier de Sardan, 1999), and the way corrupt practices reinforce inequalities within the local political economy (Shah, 2009).

This article contributes to this literature by drawing attention to heretofore unrecognised consequences of the moral logic of 'corruption' in the way it pervades and shapes the development arena (Long, 2001). Hilhorst and Jansen (2010) describe sites of humanitarian practices and actions as the 'humanitarian arena': the space of contestation and struggle for a multitude of actors in pursuit of livelihood and self-fashioning projects. Moral logics are an important force in shaping humanitarian and development arenas. I aim to *thicken* our understanding of development arenas by examining the affective and emotional dimensions of these moral logics.

In doing so, I am contributing to an emergent body of literature about emotions in development (Ballie Smith & Jenkins, 2012; Clouser, 2016; Malkki, 2015; Schwittay, 2014; Pedwell, 2012). Recognition that 'emotions matter' in development has reached as far as the World Bank (Clouser, 2016), part of a growing interest in the social sciences as to the centrality of emotion in thought and action (Beatty, 2014). While at its most simplistic, emotions are viewed as something to be harnessed as motivating factors, or overcome as barriers to more 'rational' action, more exciting research reveals the ways emotion and affect shape knowledge production, (re)produce unequal social relations, and play a role in maintaining hierarchies within development and humanitarian sectors (Malkki, 2015; Pedwell, 2012; Redfield & Bornstein, 2010; Schwittay, 2014). Emotion and affect are, I argue, productive elements in the configuring of relations and access to resources (material, social, cultural) within development arenas. I provide evidence for this proposition through the lived experiences of 'bagi-bagi'.

Drawing upon the literature on emotional and affective geographies (Ahmed, 2004; Clouser, 2016; Wetherell, 2012, 2015), I advance a concept of *moral atmosphere* as a new and productive way to interrogate the development arena. Moral atmosphere differs from moral logic that frames practices, to capture how 'bagi-bagi' is an inescapable presence, tension or energy that infects encounters between 'developers' and citizens. Bagi-bagi envelopes and permeates development practices, sticking to certain actors

(Ahmed, 2004), and marking them as objects of suspicion. People (intentionally and unintentionally) use suspicion and cynicism engendered within a moral atmosphere of *bagi-bagi* to gain access to resources, as well as to disrupt hierarchies between people with, and without, direct access to the state and state resources. The moral logic of *bagi-bagi* is shaped by the way people feel, or are affected, in scenes of development, while its consequences are not only material, but also emotional.

In the following sections I unpack the moral logic of *bagi-bagi* as an under-recognised element of the development arena in Medan that is related to, but not synonymous with 'corruption', and shed light on its productive effects. After outlining the emergence of the moral logic of *bagi-bagi* through diverse practices in Indonesia, I develop the concept of moral atmosphere as a means to capture its emotional and affective dimensions. The empirical material examines three sets of actors positioned within this moral atmosphere: welfare recipients; state cadre responsible for selecting and distributing welfare, and; volunteers in a community driven development program. The discussion draws upon their experiences to consider the ways the moral atmosphere of *bagi-bagi* shapes access to resources, subjectivities, and unequal social relations.

1.1. Study site and methods

My setting is the city of Medan, North Sumatera: the largest city in Indonesia outside Java with over two million inhabitants. It has an ethnically diverse population, with Melayu, Javanese, Batakese (Toba and Mandiling), Tamil and one of the highest proportions of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. With two local research assistants, I conducted ten months of (non-consecutive) fieldwork between April 2013 and April 2015, with follow up interviews in February 2017. We observed and participated in encounters within 'development arena': sites thick with the discourses, practices and institutions of intentional development. Our research methods aimed to be sensitive to the social elements of emotions and circulations of affect within these encounters, but also capture the ways these are personally experienced.

Beatty (2014, p. 552) argues that it is attention to the "embedding of emotion in interwoven lives" that enables an understanding of the resonance, intensity and practical significance of emotions and affect (see also Wetherell, 2012 for affective trajectories). Alongside observation and participation in scenes of development and state-citizen interactions and formal interviews, we co-constructed 17 profiles with men and women, including welfare recipients, cadre, and volunteers that provided us with the biographic details necessary to interpret how people were affected in particular scenes. These entailed between four and seven interviews, alongside more casual conversations. Emotions are difficult to access, understand and represent, creating challenges for research (Clouser, 2016). As a cross-cultural research team, we created space to mutually interrogate our interpretations of emotions and affect, our subjective reading of the significance of incidents for individuals, as well as the way we felt personally (Jakimow & Yumasdaleni, 2016). At the same time, I acknowledge the interpretation required to represent emotions and affect, which can only be partially known to the experiencer, let alone researchers.

1.2. Tracing the emergence of *bagi-bagi* within trans-national assemblages

Narratives of *Korupsi*, *Kollusi* and *Nepotisme* (KKN, corruption, collusion and nepotism) are today prevalent in the media and everyday conversations in Indonesia, becoming a key arena for the imaginative and discursive constitution of the state (Gupta, 1995). Although not labelled as such until *Reformasi* (the democratic movement in

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