

From Bohol to Leyte: Tracing the Migration Factors Influencing Boholano Movement to Macarthur

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the various factors influencing the migration of Boholanos from Clarin, Bohol to Brgy. Batug, MacArthur, Leyte. Utilizing a phenomenological qualitative design, the study gathered firsthand experiences from six Boholanos through in-depth interviews. Findings reveal that economic hardship, limited agricultural opportunities, and fear during the Japanese occupation served as primary push factors, while fertile land, diverse livelihood opportunities, and kinship networks acted as significant pull factors. The study highlights how social networks facilitated adaptation and integration into the new community, which in turn resulted in improved economic conditions, food security, and overall quality of life. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of internal migration patterns in the Philippines and can serve as a basis for recommendations for local governments to enhance livelihood opportunities and support for migrant communities.

KEYWORDS: Migration, Boholano migration, internal migration, push-pull factors, Japanese Occupation

I. INTRODUCTION

In the Philippines, migration is one of the primary factors that shaped the landscape of the country, reshaping its history, economy, and socio-cultural development. Lifetime migrants, as they are known, are very common in changing their residence from one region to another. Driven by a variety of factors that aim toward better opportunities and higher standard of living, mobility across different regions continues in contemporary times. In fact, it accounts for 23% of the internal migration cases in the country with CALABARZON, NCR, and Central Visayas as the primary magnets for destinations (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2018). The movement is nothing new as it can be traced before 1960-1970 where the emerging patterns can be characterized into two: (1) from Luzon, Eastern and Western Visayas towards Metro Manila and (2) from Visayas and some parts of Luzon to Mindanao's frontier areas (Abad, 1981). Understanding the patterns in crossing borders explains how factors play in appealing to migrants and discloses the disparity present in the other sides of the country.

Situated in the central part of the Philippines, lies the island of Bohol, in which out-migration is a common occurrence. Among the noteworthy movements from Bohol is the movement toward the province of Leyte, specifically in the municipality of MacArthur. Seen as a favorable destination, it attracted a group of migrants known as Boholanos, an ethnic minority commonly residing in Bohol. Today, these migrants are building a community that makes them so distinct from the others in MacArthur, Leyte. Their distinct language, culture, and traditions provide a strong basis for examining the factors that made Leyte a central hub of their migration. With this evident inter-island migration in Bohol and Leyte, a thorough study is needed to identify the push and pull factors that have contributed to their movement.

Thus, this study seeks to examine the primary factors that contributed to the mobility of Boholanos to MacArthur, Leyte. By exploring the economic, social and cultural aspects of migration, this study aimed to provide an in-depth analysis of how decision-making processes shape the movement of Boholanos to a new place of settlement. Such study is deemed valuable for the following reasons. First, it creates a comprehensive understanding of the migration patterns in the country, particularly the central part of the Philippines. Second, it provides insights into the firsthand experiences of the migrants as they adapted a new community, different from their own. Finally, the results of this study will be beneficial for local policymakers, helping them address the needs of migrants and implement measures to cope with the changes brought by population movement.

II. RELATED LITERATURE

A. *Internal Migration in the Philippines*

Migration studies are best explained by anchoring the push-pull theory by Lee (1966) which described the factors that influence to migrate such as the factors associated with the area of origin, destination, intervening obstacles, and personal factors. Gutierrez et al. (2020) explain that the first set of factors can be described as push factors, which relate to the migrant's place of origin.

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These include the number of friends and relatives left behind, low income levels, limited job opportunities, deteriorating health and safety conditions, and ongoing violence and tensions. Second are the pull factors, often associated with the target place of settlement. These are the factors that motivate migrants to relocate to a new place, which include available job opportunities, marriage, and a favorable political climate. Third are the obstacles that may be present between the place of origin and the destination, which can make migration difficult. For instance, these include distance, physical barriers, legal restrictions, and costs. Lastly, there are personal factors that may influence how a person decides whether or not to proceed with migration.

In the Philippines, a survey conducted by NMS in 2018 revealed that 40% are lifetime migrant and most of them moved between regions, while 15% migrated across regional and national borders within five years before 2018. What is even more interesting is that most of the migration during this period involved movements from rural-to-rural areas (PSA and UPPI, 2019, as cited in Navarro, 2023). The study indicates that migration is widespread in the country, challenging the common perception that overseas migration or rural-to-urban movement accounts for the majority of population mobility.

While there are some studies that examine internal migration in the Philippines, there are limited studies that focus on the migration of Boholanos. For instance, Adem (1982) identified eight reasons for migration in Bohol: (1) migrating for work, (2) seeking work, (3) engaging in business, (4) visiting relatives, vacation, or adventure, (5) being brought by cousins or relatives, (6) marriage or joining a spouse, and (7) pursuing studies. The remaining accounts fall under other reasons for migration. However, this data is relatively old and does not fully capture the present realities of Boholano migration. Given the gap in recent and in-depth studies on this topic, the present study seeks to uncover the factors that influence the movement of Boholanos from Bohol to Leyte.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The study employed a phenomenological qualitative research design to examine the factors that contributed to the migration of Boholanos to MacArthur, Leyte. By employing phenomenological design, the researchers sought to understand the phenomenon by looking through the experiences of the people behind it and in return, expanding the researcher's knowledge on the phenomenon (Dumlao, n.d.). This design is deemed suitable for the nature of the study as it captured the perspectives of migrants and allowed the researchers to have an in-depth understanding of their lived-experiences in Bohol and to their adapted home, MacArthur Leyte.

B. Research Locale

The study was conducted in Brgy. Batug, MacArthur, Leyte, a known area where Boholano migrants currently reside. The site was selected because of the significant number of Boholanos who have established their lives in the community, making it a reasonable location for gathering information from the migrants. Furthermore, the chosen locality enabled the study to acquire both individual and shared experiences among the migrants.

C. Participants of the Study

To ensure that firsthand experiences will be collected from the Boholanos, a set of criteria was established by the researchers in determining the participants of the study. The criteria included:

1. Head of households (male or female)
2. Forty years old and above
3. Individuals with Boholano origin
4. Must have resided in Brgy. Batug, MacArthur, Leyte for at least a year.

Table 1. Profile of Identified Participants

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Origin</i>	<i>Years of Residing</i>
1	51	Male	Clarin, Bohol	25
2	58	Male	Clarin, Bohol	25
3	59	Female	Clarin, Bohol	25
4	53	Female	Clarin, Bohol	25
5	64	Female	Clarin, Bohol	25
6	62	Female	Clarin, Bohol	25

D. Sampling Technique

Since the researchers established a criteria which is relevant in the selection of participants, purposive sampling was utilized. This sampling technique allows the researchers to choose the participants based to the set criteria which includes their knowledge of the topic, the willingness to take part in the study (Oliver, 2006). Thus, by focusing on the Boholanos who are qualified based on the provided criteria, the gathered data is reliable and directly from the firsthand experiences of the migrants.

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E. Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide was designed by the research to explore the factors that influenced the migration of Boholanos to MacArthur, Leyte. The interview guide was composed of open-ended questions intended to uncover their experiences, challenges, and the reasons for their migration to a new land. To ensure an in-depth understanding, the following sections were included: (1) Part I: Demographic Profile; (2) Economic Background; (3) Factors Influencing the Decision to Migrate; (4) Support Systems During Migration and (5) Present Economic Situation in MacArthur, Leyte.

F. Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering procedure formally began with seeking permission from the local officials of Brgy. Batug, MacArthur, Leyte to conduct the interviews. After receiving approval, the researchers coordinated with recognized community leaders to identify and finalize the participants who met the established criteria.

Once identified, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was secured to ensure that their participation was purely voluntary. After agreeing to the terms and condition, the date and time for the interviews were scheduled. Each interview was conducted separately, lasting 20–40 minutes, using the language or dialect most comfortable for the respondents. The data collected during the interviews were recorded and securely stored for transcription.

G. Data Analysis

The data gathered from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Nowell et al. (2017) outline six phases of thematic analysis as follows: (1) familiarizing oneself with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) writing the final report. This method ensured a thorough analysis of the data, allowing the researchers to uncover the collective experiences that the migrants had gone through.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Economic Landscape Behind Boholano Migration

A comprehensive analysis of participant narratives reveals that severe economic hardship served as the primary factor for Boholano migration to MacArthur, Leyte. The migrants' testimonies consistently highlighted three factors that compelled their relocation: agricultural limitations, income instability, and the Japanese occupation.

The initial and most critical factor was agricultural limitations restricted their opportunities to cultivate crops. As noted by Participant #1:

"An akon mga kag-anak gin-yaknan ako na an ira pinagkakakuhaan hin income kay an pagtatanom hin duma sugad han balanghoy, kamote, ngan ustarin. Amo la an ira natatanom tungod han mala-in na kalidad han tuna na mayda it Clarin. Gin-istoryahan hiya han iya tatay na it tuna ngadto kay batuon ngan masapara amo dire iton angay pagtamnan hin mga pananom." (My parents explained that their primary livelihood came from cultivating root crops like cassava, sweet potatoes, and ustarin. These were the only crops they could grow due to the poor soil quality in Clarin. My father specifically mentioned that the land's rocky composition and coarse texture made it unsuitable for most agricultural cultivation).

The participants' accounts consistently portrayed Clarin, Bohol's agricultural landscape as severely limited, with many describing the soil quality using the local term "*batuon an tuna*"—literally meaning "stone-like land." This geographical constraint has resulted in food insecurity, limited job opportunities, and low agricultural productivity in the area. Due to this fundamental limitation on crop cultivation, many families have been forced to rely primarily on hardy root crops such as cassava and sweet potatoes for basic sustenance. This also forced other residents to venture fishing. The limited farming options have subsequently pushed many households toward fishing-based livelihoods.

However, this alternative livelihood strategy introduced new socioeconomic challenges, particularly regarding income stability and reliability. As noted by Participant #2.

"Bumal-in kami ha Batug kay an amon panginabuhidit ha Clarin, Bohol kay makuri." (We relocated to Brgy. Batug because the living condition in Clarin, Bohol is difficult especially the land quality is not good and there are times that they cannot have a decent catch.) [P2]

The shift to fishing livelihoods, while providing an alternative income source, revealed significant systemic challenges. As Participant #2 shared:

"Bumal-in kami ha Batug kay an amon panginabuhidit ha Clarin, Bohol kay makuri." (We relocated to Brgy. Batug

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because the living condition in Clarin, Bohol is difficult especially the land quality is not good and there are times that they cannot have a decent catch.) [P2]

The transition from agricultural to marine-based livelihoods among these communities does not reflect socioeconomic improvement but rather constitutes a coping mechanism in response to environmental and economic pressures. This pattern illustrates how resource-constrained households adopt adaptive livelihood strategies in response to the dual pressures of degraded agricultural land and unstable fisheries. However, such coping mechanisms remain insufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods, leaving residents trapped in cycle of poverty.

The final catalyst for migration was the pervasive fear under Japanese occupation (1942–1945), which compelled residents to flee retaliatory violence. As one descendant recounted:

"Bumail-in hira ha Brgy. Batug tungod kay usa han ira mga amyaw kay gin-yaknan hira na mabal-in hira ha Leyte ngan nahadlok hira han mga Hapon tungod kay damo na ha mga Boholano hadto na mga panahon an na bulig ha mga gerilya." (They relocated to Barangay Batug because a neighbor warned them to evacuate to Leyte, fearing Japanese reprisals due to widespread Boholano support for guerrilla forces.) [P3]

The wartime displacement during the Japanese occupation was driven by three interconnected factors. First, sheer fear of military retaliation pushed civilians to flee their homes as a survival strategy. Second, tight-knit community networks enabled organized evacuation, as neighbors warned each other and migrated together for safety. Most significantly, Bohol's active guerrilla resistance movement made ordinary civilians potential targets, forcing entire communities to relocate under threat of violence. Together, these elements - survival instincts, social bonds, and political targeting - created a perfect storm of forced migration that reshaped the region's population patterns.

B. Strategic Relevance of Batug, MacArthur

Multiple factors explain why Brgy. Batug, MacArthur, Leyte was chosen as the primary destination hub for Boholanos. Early migrants' feedback, favorable agricultural conditions, and economic opportunities made the small community highly attractive. These factors enticed the Boholanos to settle in a new land in search of growth, stability, and a better future for their families.

A strong sense of interconnectedness is evident in the participants' responses, as the majority of them share blood ties with the Leria family. According to one participant, the Lerias were among the early migrants to Brgy. Batug. During their visits to Bohol in the 1970s, the Lerias encouraged their relatives to migrate to Leyte. This suggests that as early as the 1970s, Brgy. Batug was already inhabited by Boholanos. As these stories spread, social networks expanded, and more Boholanos relocated, following in the footsteps of their relatives.

"An amon urupod na hi Leria kay nag engganyo ha amon na mangukoy dide ha MacArthur, Leyte. Hadton mga dekada 70 nagbakasyon hira balik ha amon bungto nagyakan hira na an mga tuna ha Barangay Batug kay maupay pananman ngan dako na pursyento ngadto maupay pananuman hin humay ngan damo an kalubian." (Our relative, Leria, encouraged us to settle in MacArthur, Leyte. Back in the 1970s, they visited our hometown for a vacation and told us that Brgy. Batug had fertile land for farming, with high yields for rice cultivation and many coconut trees.) [P1]

Another strong pull factor for the Boholano migrants is the promising agricultural conditions that Brgy. Batug offers. Participants consistently emphasized the fertile land that appealed to many. Unlike the low-quality agricultural soils in Clarin, Bohol, Brgy. Batug has often been described as fertile, making it suitable for rice cultivation, coconut farming, vegetables, and other produce. This superior soil quality is considered the strongest among all pull factors, as food security and better livelihood opportunities were seen as top priorities for the migrants. This was observed in the response of one participant who shared:

"An usa pa na rason kay maupay na klase hit tuna nganhi matambok kumapara ha Clarin." (Another reason is that the soil here is fertile and of better quality than in Clarin). [P6]

This response reflects the common perception among migrants that Batug offers better soil, which in turn provides greater opportunities for farming and harvests. Such a response shows that environmental conditions were a primary factor influencing the decisions of the Boholanos. With land security, greater chances of stable livelihoods await future generations.

Lastly, aside from the fertile lands, economic opportunities was observed in Brgy. Batug that became one of the influencing factors for their migration. As one of the participants recalled:

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"Han binmisita an ak mga kag-anak, ira nakumpara an kinabuhi dinhe ha Leyte kumpara ha Clarin. Na obserbahan nira na it Batug kay damo iton opurtunidad labi na hit panrabahuan sugad hit pananom, pagmananggiti ngan pag trabaho ha koprasan. (When my parents visited, they compared the life here in Leyte to that of Clarin. They observed that Batug offers many opportunities, particularly of livelihood such as farming, coconut sap harvesting and working in coconut production.) They observed that Batug offers many opportunities, particularly livelihood activities such as farming, coconut sap harvesting, and working in coconut production. [P4]

Their awareness of the economic landscape in Batug provided them with the opportunity to weigh its advantages compared to what they had in Clarin, Bohol. Faced with previous agricultural restrictions, they were drawn to the better opportunities that Batug could offer. Economic stability, therefore, became a major factor in choosing Batug as their preferred destination.

C. Post-Migration Life Transformation

The relocation of Boholano settlers to MacArthur, Leyte, represents a profound transformation in their everyday lives. First and foremost, the offer of abundant agricultural lands.

"Namal-in kami ha Batug kay usa han amon urupod an mga Leria an nag yakan ha amon na maupay puy-an an ngan an tuna kay primera klase. (We relocated to Batug because our relatives, the Leria's, told us that the land is of prime quality and there are abundant livelihood opportunities such as working in the copra industry, farming, tuba production, and coconut gathering.) [P6]

This shift in farming conditions opened a vital path toward economic prosperity. Whereas Bohol's infertile, rocky terrain had restricted cultivation to sparse subsistence crops, Leyte's "prime quality" land empowered participants to achieve transformative livelihood diversification—a transition explicitly validated in their testimonies.

"Maruupay it amon kabutangan ngadi ha Batug kay mayda kami ngadi trabaho, parehas hit pagmananggiti, pag-uma ha hagna, pagpasuhol, paghurnal." (We have much better living conditions here in Barangay Batug because we've gained access to diverse livelihoods, including coconut harvesting, upland farming, paid labor, and copra production work.) [P2]

The availability of diverse livelihood opportunities—such as copra production, upland farming, and contractual labor—served as a major attraction, offering economic stability that was unattainable in their origin communities. Additionally, better living conditions and access to wage-based employment provided a stronger sense of financial security compared to Bohol's declining agricultural prospects. These pull factors, combined with the possibility of skill diversification and community-based labor networks, made MacArthur, Leyte a more viable destination.

Beyond improving their livelihoods, the move led to a marked improvement in their living conditions. Participant 5 highlighted achieving food security as a key outcome: shifting from subsistence-level survival on limited crops to consuming nutritious meals.

"Naghingaupay an amon kahintang tikang han namal-in na kami dida ha Batug kumpara han naukoy pa kami ngada ha Clarin, Bohol. Ngadi ha Batug nakakaon na kami hin tuhay dire parehas han una na sige la an pagkaon ha amon hin duma." (Our economic condition has improved since we relocated to Batug compared to when we still lived in Clarin, Bohol. Here in Barangay Batug, we now eat proper meals unlike before when we constantly ate root crops.) [P5]

The prospect of consistent access to nutritious sustenance motivated Boholano migrants to establish permanent residence in the community. Food security emerged as the principal catalyst for their resettlement decision. This transition resolved prior livelihood problems rooted in inadequate agricultural conditions.

The migration transition to Clarin, Bohol was also significantly facilitated by pre-existing social networks, with kinship ties playing a pivotal role in newcomers' adaptation processes. Most migrants reported relying heavily on relatives already established in the area, who provided crucial support across multiple dimensions: temporary housing during the initial settlement period, introductions to potential employers, and small loans to help families get back on their feet. This assistance proved particularly valuable given the challenges of adapting to a new environment.

"Oo, ginbuligan hira han amon amyaw labi na pinautang hi Tatay para mamal-in hira ni Nanay ngan han akon Manoy hit igparasahe tikadto ha Leyte." (Yes, my parents and my brother were able to relocate because their neighbors lent them money for their move to Batug, Leyte.) [P3]

Furthermore, the presence of family members created an immediate sense of community belonging, reducing the psychological

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stress of relocation. This support system not only helped with basic survival needs but also accelerated economic integration, as newcomers could tap into established family members' knowledge of local job markets and business opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Boholanos are a great example of how migration isn't influenced by a single factor, rather, it is shaped by a combination of various factors, primarily economic, environmental, social, and historical. With economic hardship as the main push factor driving Boholano migration, these families yearned for better living conditions. Their long journey from Clarin, Bohol to Brgy. Batug, MacArthur, Leyte mirrors the realities of a typical Filipino rural community, facing agricultural limitations and unstable sources of income. Despite these hurdles, they found their way to establish a better settlement in a new land, one with improved economic conditions and a more favorable environment. As for the pull factors, it all boils down to the promising opportunities that MacArthur, Leyte offered. From its fertile land to its economic opportunities, MacArthur gave the Boholanos new hope to start fresh in a place very different from their homeland. Ultimately, the migration gave the Boholanos an opportunity to improve their lives. Through their social networks and kinship ties, they were able to achieve the security they longed for.

RECOMMENDATION

Given the hurdles faced by the Boholanos, it is recommended that the local government unit of Clarin, Bohol improve and strengthen agricultural productivity, especially in areas with poor soil development. To encourage communities to stay, they should also develop alternative livelihood programs that are suitable to the environment of Clarin. In this way, improved livelihood opportunities and stronger agricultural support will be available for the communities. As for the Local Government Unit of MacArthur, Leyte, there is a need to establish support centers for migrants that offer livelihood training and development programs aimed at helping them achieve economic stability and long-term growth. Lastly, this study has its own limitations, particularly in terms of the number of participants and the generation of migrants represented. For future studies, it is recommended to include the perspectives of migrants from different generations to better understand how their views have changed over time.

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