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SO FAR, YET HOME? **The Impact of Colonization and** **Globalization on the Philippine Family**

This paper looks at the changing role of the Filipino family from **precapitalist** to present times. After exploring the issue of how the **precolonial** and **precapitalist** family changed in response to colonization, it focuses on the question of how the underlying structure of the modern family has changed as a result of the impact of global capitalism. The paper ends with a brief reflection on some of the implications of changed family relations, structures, and roles **for** the moral fiber of the family and economy.

Introduction: Precapitalist family and Society

The Philippine family regime in **precolonial** times was a vast and complex system that had no parallels in Europe (*cf.* Baldick 1962). The family consisted of the incorporation of the couple into the social hierarchy of the local community, which emerged under the leadership of a protector with charismatic qualities. Kinship played a role in the development of social hierarchy on the islands (Andaya 2006; Wolters 1982; Rafael 1988). However, there was no state-led bureaucratic authority as in early imperial China, India, or Siam, among other examples. Instead, local kingdoms, or fiefdoms, shifted and emerged in response to local experiences and circumstances. There were many competing centers of power whose rulers strove not to colonize their neighbors but, rather, include them in their network of **kith and kin**. **Mostly** males but also females served as political leaders. One may go so far as to speculate that Filipino women may have enjoyed **a** position that **was** mutually respectful of the **others'** dignity in relation to men, more **so** than did women in ancient China or Mongolia, for example, where historical records resound with manly

voices saying women are only for pleasure and their ability to bear children. Barbara Andaya (2006, Ch. 6) documents more than a handful of cases of Malay-Indonesian queens leading royal followings in their own right, although there is no later evidence of their existence after the eighteenth century, which makes sense if the colonizers chose not to work through them (p. 169). The boundaries marking early Indonesian and Philippine polities fluctuated as new alliances formed, histories merged, and new leaders arose.

According to Laura Lee Junker (1999a, 78), early lord-vassal relationships in the Philippines and the wider region of which it was part were structured and patterned after those of the family. Andaya (1992, 408) explains that the exchange of women that strengthened and solidified lord-vassal ties for children conceived, in and out of wedlock, were visible signs of kinship. As she explains,

elite intermarriages and the flow of women through hypergamous marriages to men, especially *datu*s, of higher rank were tied to a prestige goods economy through bride wealth payments, which redistributed foreign porcelains and other accumulated status goods between “wife-takers” and “wife-givers.” (Andaya 1992, 81)

That is, successful leaders were able to accumulate a large quantity of prestige goods and slaves in the wider maritime economy that contributed to the pool of wealth to be drawn from making political marriage alliances for the kinship group. “Heirlooms and other status goods flowed to the women’s kin groups, while it was primarily ‘prestige,’ which flowed to the man’s kin group” (Junker 2000, 299). A man’s prestige was tied to the status of his wives-to-be and the extravagance of the public display of the bride wealth payment his family could offer.

If the man’s kin could not afford to pay the bride price, the prospective husband could sell himself into slavery to his father-in-law in the form of bride price, much in the same way as Jacob did for the hand of Rachel and Leah, as told in the Old Testament. Adelamar Alcantara (1994, 95) explains that by so doing, a man demonstrated his sincerity and strong work ethic to his wife’s family by effectively proving that he would be a good provider. His services to her family could last for a few months or longer, until the woman’s family was sufficiently satisfied that he would become a worthy member of the family. However, later, this practice would be largely outlawed as a result of Spanish colonial Catholicism in the sixteenth century.

In brief, important genealogical claims were the fulcrum around which the ancient regime of the family was oriented and found its being. These familial claims were based on achieving a founding line of descent and establishing fictive kinship relations horizontally in the present. This emphasis on the present had an impact on how social and political bonds emerged at the local levels, where social relations, not private property, were most highly valued. [In this context](#) customary interactions between local leaders and family heads and their immediate and adopted kin, including those who were in and out of debt, or enslaved, [were](#) ordinarily mutually respectful.

Impact of Colonization

By the sixteenth century, when the Spaniards came to the Philippines, local people were trading with other royal polities across the seas much like communities living along the Silk Road had done for centuries. Foreigners brought silks, precious porcelains, iron implements and tools, and other products to the Philippines, in exchange for gold, pearls, resins, medicinal herbs, beeswax, rattans, exotic flowers, [various kinds of woods](#), [other rich forest and sea products](#), [and textiles](#) and other handicrafts. One of the earliest known maritime states to do business with the Philippines was the Sri-Vijaya Empire coming out of Sumatra, Indonesia, which controlled east-west trade through the straight of Malacca for 400 years from 700 to 1100 CE (Abinales and Amoroso 2005). The ancient Chinese [also](#) [traded](#) with the Philippines, at [least](#) since the Tang and Sung dynasties of the 10th and 11th centuries (Nadeau 2008, 23).

Spanish colonization (1521-1896) led to the decline of pre-existing and often prosperous economic and political centers in the Philippines, due to lack of any real incentives for the “Indios” (e.g., see Mojares 1991). The Spaniards attempted to monopolize and control the trade routes by requiring by law that all [goods](#) [be](#) coursed through Manila. They worked through local headman who helped them to exploit and exact tribute from their followers. This strategy destroyed the criteria governing the pre-existing [follower-leader](#) system because it supported collaborators and disempowered any leader who would go against them. [Precolonial](#) leadership roles were open and contestable, even when inherited, because they were part of autonomous communities that shifted as new leaders emerged. Local leaders were family-like heads of large households who earned their positions by means of attracting a large group of loyal followers. The Spanish, as did the American colonizers who came later,

undermined this authentic leadership system by using the military to put their own crony chiefs in power to do their bidding.

The colonizers negotiated their terms of settlement mainly through the agency of male leaders, while females, who, hypothetically, held positions of high esteem and authority in the bilateral and complimentary contexts of the precolonial family system, were displaced. The ancient regime of the family in the early Philippines differed substantially from that of Spain. Differences in gender roles, for example, may have simply been differences in work patterns that complemented each other, with a feeling of mutuality and dignity, to form an undifferentiated whole. By contrast, women in Spain were probably seen as potential competitors with men, who had to be kept in their place. Scholars like Blanc-Szanton (1990) and Errington (1990) stressed that early Filipino ideology of gender differences was complementary. The opposite sexes complemented each other rather than competed against each other.

In Southeast Asia, the authentic leader-follower system (still) is the realization that a relation of authority of high over low exists, that master and disciple, teacher and student, parents and children need each other in striving for ascendancy. This relation is based on cooperation, not competition. Spanish, like American colonial policy, attempted to solidify local leadership positions, and in effect, transformed local leaders into permanent lower-level authorities, as long as they cooperated. Rafael (pp. 13-17) argues that "the extension of Spanish colonial rule into local communities generated new divisions between natives who paid tribute and natives who collected it." The indigenous elite now sanctioned by outside military force could opportunistically shift between colonial overlords and their subjects. They could take surplus from a community and keep part of it for themselves in the form of goods or indentured servitude. Although the local leaders were accorded land and freed from tribute and corvee labor by the Spaniards, their prior wealth and power derived less from the land than from the tribute and services rendered by their followers. The colonial government, be that of Spain or the United States, undermined this older system by exacting head taxes on all commoners. It accomplished this through warfare and indoctrination and conversion. Subjects fled from tax collectors and former rulers, or when prevented from doing so, insidiously and, sometimes, openly rebelled.

Undoubtedly, the Spanish and, later, American colonization process had a disintegrating effect on the pre-existing regime of the family.

Impact of Globalization: Outsourcing Laborers

Under colonization, the Philippines produced crops and mined minerals for sale and export on the world market. After gaining independence in 1946, it began rebuilding the nation, which was devastated by World War II (1935-1945). The Philippines underwent rapid development and modernization. By 1960, it was being showcased as a model for development in the region. It had a newly emerging middle class and one of the highest literacy rates in Asia. However, when Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law in 1972, the economy was **going toward** shambles. The already high unemployment and inflation rate was increasing as a result of the oil crisis of the early 1970s. **Marcos** also absconded foreign aid moneys for himself and his cronies that had been targeted for rural development projects. Disenfranchised agricultural workers were pouring **en masse** into already overcrowded cities looking for work. Meanwhile, the high demand for labor in the Gulf States began to attract Filipinos in huge numbers. The Marcos government capitalized on this overseas employment trend by establishing a mandatory overseas employment training and placement program to gain new tax revenues.

By the 1990s, the Asian **economic crisis** pushed yet another outflow of migrant workers from the Philippines. However, this time there were many more new opportunities for women to work as domestic housemaids, nannies, and nurses, among other service industry jobs. By 2001, more than 90% of all overseas contract workers were females (2001 Migration Statistics Sheet; also 2000 Fast Facts on Philippine Labor Migration). This unprecedented feminization of **migration** from the Philippines was accompanied by social networks of non-government organizations, churches, and families, which, in turn, exerted a transformative influence over the prevailing concept of the family, as many mothers took on the traditional Filipino male role of breadwinner.

The 2000 demographic profile of the Philippines reported that female new hires dominated the service and professional occupations. Approximately, 7.29 million overseas Filipinos were working in 187 countries around the world in 2001. During this time period, remittances from overseas contract workers through banks reached **US\$8 billion** (*The Philippine Star* daily newspaper January 22, 2000). Only 0.1% or 333 of the deployed female new hires were in managerial positions in 1999, while 91% of the newly deployed **women** were **service workers** (domestic helpers, caretakers, hotel workers, and **those in similar occupations**). (Fast Facts on Philippine Labor Migration: 11, 2000).

In 2010, the Philippine National Statistics Office reported that an estimated million Filipinos leave the country to work overseas each year. In 2009, there were an estimated 8.7 to 11 million overseas Filipinos worldwide, which is 11% of the total population of the Philippines. In 2008, some US\$15.9 billion were remitted back to the Philippines, up from US\$14.4 billion in 2007. In 2009, remittances from overseas Filipino workers totaled about US\$17,348 billion. The majority of these overseas Filipinos worked as domestics and in the personal care services.

The overseas migration of contract workers is a major source of foreign currency for the Philippines and helps raise the standard of living for thousands of families but at what cost? Female migrants often suffer ethnic and gender discrimination in the host countries. Some risk being sexually assaulted or having their wages and passports withheld by their employers. Mothers separated from their children and spouses suffer tremendously, as do children, and husbands, who emotionally need their mothers, and wives. Children without mothers, husbands without wives, sometimes have terrible behavior problems because they feel abandoned, emotionally. What happens when family members depend on someone working overseas to buy them what they want? Does this create issues of dependency and lack of appreciation for the value of hard work? There are so many questions. While non-government organizations contest and protest against discriminatory practices in the host societies (Law and Nadeau 1999; Lindio-McGovern 2004), and churches often offer a loving and supportive community for the better wellbeing of migrant workers, so much more needs to be done. While the well-known solution is for the government to take the lead in providing opportunities for Filipinos to build a better Philippines, instead of outsourcing so much talent to work for strangers, it is easier to say than do. Finally, what happens when one labors inside the Philippines but earns not enough to support themselves or their family?

Globalization: The Influx of Call Centers

Before discussing the resilience of the Filipino family, when separated for long periods of time by huge geographical distances, this section looks at the issue of how the family has changed as a result of globalization as young people get connected with the call-center culture. This question is raised, mainly, for further discussion and future research work, as there is scant literature available. The Philippines has overtaken India as the number one destination for

the call-center industry, employing some 350,000 operators as compared with India's 330,000, according to the January 9, 2011, news release, "Philippines passes India in call-center jobs," published in *USA Today*. The Contact Center of the Philippines reports that call-centers generated some \$6.3 billion in tax revenues last year. As well, the government offers some scholarships to train workers and tax incentives to multinational corporations that bring jobs into the country. However, the Philippine family is changing from globalization and the incoming of the global services industry because young people connected with the call-center culture think that it is the global culture, yet the reality for them is very different.

Lots of young people also are dying young from, e.g., kidney problems because they work in call-centers. [Fristine de Gula](#) (2010) refers to such kinds of diseases as "lifestyle diseases." Call-center operators are prone to getting hypertension and stroke, ulcers and acid reflux, diabetes and anemia because they work at night, sit at their stations for long hours, without relieving themselves until their break times, and eat fast food, because that is what is available and they do not have time to go outside to eat right! Accordingly:

They practically live on unhealthy diets of processed food, smokes, cups of coffee and severe lack of exercise: a significant number of them believe having drinks with colleagues after work [at 7 AM in the morning] is somewhat necessary to build up their social relationships and rapport. These practices lead to whole host of diseases that traditionally were seen in old people and may even lead to depression and family discord (De Gula, 2010).

The call-centers are air conditioned to create the ambiance of being in America. But this gives the young people a distorted perception of what is happening and what kind of life they want for their future. Those who are married go home to sleep during the daytime hours while their children are awake. There is no communication between them. The parents want to preserve the family but how can they do that if their stomachs are empty?

Inner Persistence and Strength of the Family

In 1986, the first "People Power Revolution" overthrew the dictator, Ferdinand Marcos, and they did so peacefully. In 2001, the second Peoples Power Revolution ousted the inept and corrupt President Joseph Estrada from power. He was succeeded by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. In 2010, Benigno Aquino III was popular-

ly elected into the presidency. Although leading families and military elites still control powerful governmental posts, they are being called to account by peoples movements calling for greater equity, justice, and democracy. Despite the tumultuous and rapidly changing times, the resilience of the Filipino family living in the great diaspora becomes evident.

Gelia Castillo (1968, 116; in Medina, 17) explains that the Filipino family is residentially nuclear but functionally extended. In other words, it is common practice for young married couples living in a barrio setting to set up their own independent nuclear household but their parents usually live across the way. That is, the household tends to be nuclear in form but the family is extended in so far as relationships between members of the wider kin group are concerned. Members of the same kin group assist one another in time of need, and they participate together in joint family activities even if they do not live together in the same household or are living overseas. If the family living together in the same residential unit includes members other than a husband, wife, and their children, it is an extended family household. Many Filipino families living in the Philippines and abroad such as in Canada or southern California actually live in extended family households. It is practical and common for Filipino migrants looking for work in distant cities to be housed by relatives already in residence there, if they have them. Filipinos who have made it abroad are well known to sincerely invite parents to stay as part of their filial obligations. The family household may include grandparents, an unmarried aunt, an uncle or a cousin, a niece or nephew.

The Filipino nuclear family household, today, still is more commonly found in the rural areas than in the cities, or abroad. That is, to say it again, is quite expensive for a typical family, or single person, starting a new life in the city to rent, build, or purchase a home right away. It is much easier for a family to construct a dwelling made of light materials such as bamboo and other natural plants that are freely available in a natural village or barrio setting. These simple homes are considered by many educated Filipinos today to be elegant and environmentally attuned with nature. This appreciation for traditional dwellings was not the case under the influence of American colonialism and Americanization, when concrete homes with corrugated steel roofs were introduced to replace them. Also, kin members can build their household dwellings close to each other in rural communities, which may not be an option in the city. Moreover, Filipinos who move away to study or work in cities, locally and

abroad, tend to stay with their more affluent relatives, and this increases the size of the family household.

Virginia Miralao (1997) examines the transformation of Philippine society in relation to modernization theories that were first introduced by Durkheim and Weber. These evolutionary models posited that as societies modernize, social relationships become more impersonal and business-like. At the same time, modern societies were characterized as being less religiously oriented and more scientifically grounded. But Philippine society does not accord with this predictive model. While dehumanization processes caused by top-down globalization are all pervasive in Philippine society, popular religious and social movements for an alternative, holistic, and integral development paradigm are ascending. Moreover, family and family-like relationships are highly valued in the work place.

Filipinos prefer to have smooth interpersonal relations, and tend to create an atmosphere in which the people around them feel comfortable and accepted. There is a strong concept of face in the Philippines. This means that Filipinos are taught to be sensitive to other people's feelings and, generally, do not say words that may embarrass or shame a fellow human being (Miralao 1997). Parents also consider it their duty to provide for the material and educational needs of their children, if affordable. Children are expected to obey and respect their parents and to take care of them when they grow old. Decision-making, traditionally and currently even in Filipino America, is typically not done independently or arbitrarily on one's own but rather, in consultation and by reaching a consensus. Older children, until they get married and have a family of their own, are expected to help younger siblings with school, and to assist them in getting a job after graduation. While the traditional regime of the Philippine family that overruled ancient society, no doubt, has been overturned and changed, its underlying structure based on feelings of resistance against those who would breakup and disenfranchise the family and of helping one another to succeed continues into the 21st century.

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