

Philippine Studies of Women: A Review

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The Filipina has been described in many ways. At times, she has been referred to as shy, submissive, and pretty, much like the traditional Maria Clara. At other times, she has been portrayed as independent, enterprising, powerful, or influential, and quite "liberated," particularly when seen in comparison with her Asian women neighbors. "The power behind the throne," she is often called, the "throne" presumably being a position of significance visibly occupied by some man.

The Filipina's enviable position of influence and power in Philippine society is often supported by an enumeration of women who have occupied (or currently occupy) important positions in public structures, whether as senators, governors, mayors, or members of the judiciary, or as occupants of university and diplomatic posts. Yet when one examines empirical data, this common observation is not quite borne out. Available studies indicate that the Filipina's access, perceived or actual, to positions of power, as well as her participation in public affairs, has been rather limited.

The Position of the Filipina

John Carroll, in his study of Filipino entrepreneurs in the early sixties, found that among the ninety-two top corporation managers he identified, there were only five women. Similar trends were shown in two studies of national and local influentials (Makil, 1970 and 1975). In 1969 there were only seven women among those pinpointed as the top 170 influentials at the national level, and in 1975, only nine out of 140. The same patterns surfaced among local-level influentials.

Other studies at the local level also indicate that only about one-third of women are members of local organizations, their membership usually concentrated in neighborhood groups and religious and socio-civic organizations, the concerns of which are those traditionally delegated to women—beautification campaigns, nutrition, and the like (Miralao, 1980).

Looking back, it seems that early study of women in the Philippines began quite unobtrusively, was perhaps even unwittingly done by social researchers. For example, questions about women's roles or activities were included in studies of the family, of family planning, or of such social structures as the bureaucracy or the corporation, or in a case study of a textile company. Their "incidental" nature notwithstanding,

these studies may be considered the foundations of later studies that were more specifically designed to look into "the woman question," providing early insights into the roles men and women play in Philippine society.

One such pioneering study is the 1967 Family Survey of the Baguio Religious Acculturation Conference (Lynch and Makil, 1967). While the major thrust of the study was to examine people's attitudes toward family planning at that time, it also sought to discover perceptions of ideal family roles, specifically those of a mother or father, a husband or wife, and a son or daughter.

In that study, sex-based distinctions of respondents' role perceptions emerged. For instance, the ideal husband was perceived as a good provider, and the ideal wife, a good household manager. The ideal wife or mother was seen as a religious woman, close to God, and without major vices of any kind. On the other hand, the husband or father need not be specifically close to God, but should be morally good, this goodness manifested by his fidelity to his wife. Sons were expected to avoid falling into "bad ways," while daughters should both do this and grow closer to God in faith and piety. Interestingly, respondents perceived the average wife, mother, or daughter as approaching these ideals more closely than the average husband, father, or son.

Later investigations, particularly those in the mid-70s (after the proclamation of the Women's International Year in 1975), became more sharply focused as studies of women. A cursory examination of these reveals a confirmation of the 1967 BRAC survey findings with respect to roles and role expectations for men and women. Women's roles were seen as revolving around the house, while those of the men, around family support (good provider, bread winner, economic security). In addition, these findings held true across community settings (rural, urban, and semi-urban) and across generations (young and old).

Outside of role perceptions, studies also looked into the actual exercise of these roles. One focus was the area of decision making in the home. Here, studies showed a tendency toward shared decision making. At least three studies (Mendez and Jocano, 1974; Licuanan and Gonzalez, 1976; Porio, Lynch, and Hollsteiner, 1975), showed these typical areas where shared decision making occurs: choice of residence (note that legally, the husband has this prerogative), improvements on the house, choice of vacation spot, buying appliances, recreation, discipline of children, choice of school for children, planning of family ventures, and important problems that the couple faces. However, this sharing pattern notwithstanding, these studies also show that when decisions are made, the husband and the wife actually have particular decision-making spheres.

For instance, high participation among wives occurs where the issue revolves around activities traditionally considered female concerns, while husbands' participation is high when the issue involves those activities traditionally considered theirs. Falling into the wife's domain, therefore, are the household budget, child rearing, household chores, and the discipline of daughters (Mendez and Jocano, 1974; Porio et al., 1975). The men, on the other hand, take charge of matters related to occupational livelihood and the discipline of sons (Licuanan and Gonzalez, 1976).

One of the more common observations made about the Filipino woman pertains to the source of her power and influence, that of being the manager of the family budget. (Incidentally, it should be noted that this role proceeds from the legally recognized role of the wife as household manager.) Indeed, studies show that the woman *is* the family treasurer. Budgeting as well as stretching the peso are her problems, the man's obligation being simply to turn over his earnings to her (Mendez and Jocano; Licuanan and Gonzalez). Observers of this phenomenon, however, argue that "women in the lower socioeconomic bracket are unable to exercise the power and resource allocation aspects of this function to a significant degree, since they have hardly any options as to where the money should go, the choices being predetermined by the demands of survival." Parenthetically, I might observe that while the leanness of the household pocketbook may limit the wife's exercise of budgetary powers to a certain extent, what is more important perhaps is the woman's actual access to the exercise of decision making in this important sphere. Hollnsteiner, speaking of economic conditions in a recent Philippine Studies Conference (Kalamazoo, 1980) said, "Don't knock a poor purse." But how this household power is translated into the public sphere is a different question. Studies cited earlier seem to indicate that the exercise of this "power" in the household is hardly carried over to non-domestic spheres.

Legal studies on the status of women, notably that of Irene Cortes (1975), pinpoint areas where discrepancies in privileges and options based on sex occur under Philippine law. The most classic example, of course, occurs in legal separation cases, where the wife has the greater burden than her husband of proving that legitimate causes exist for legally separating from him. (A divorce bill pending before the Batasang Pambansa is intended to correct this anomalous situation.) It was noted that the husband has the prerogative of determining the family's place of residence. He also has "veto power" over a wife's decision to seek employment outside the home.

The Filipina and National Development

More recently, researchers interested in women have shifted to examining the partnership of men and women in the developmental process. Under this framework, the role of the Filipina is examined not only with reference to her domestic activities but, more importantly, to her participation in public activities. Earlier studies, after all, show the Filipino woman's significant involvement in development evidenced by her participation in agricultural activities, e.g., crop production, processing, marketing, and other productive activities, in order to augment the household income generated by the man (Miralao, 1980).

At the Institute of Philippine Culture (IPC), Ateneo de Manila University, a Women in Development (WID) research project began about two years ago, designed primarily to elicit indicators to measure women's participation in development more accurately. The study assumes "that members of the population participate in the process of national development through their involvement in various institutions and spheres of activity, as in the maintenance of the home, in directly income-producing work, and in community activities. Participation in the various spheres of activity, however, is not equally open to the population, and it is generally admitted that cultural role prescriptions favor women's entry and participation in domestic activities, and males in nondomestic ones" (Miralao, 1980: 4). A pilot study conducted in three communities in Luzon reveals the following findings in terms of men and women's participation in various aspects of development (cf. Miralao, 1980).

Domestic and market participation.

Women bear the brunt of housework, regardless of marital and employment status and developmental stages of communities. Among the married respondents, male and female spheres in the housework are highly unequal—the husbands, on the average, spend only about one-third as much time as their wives in housework. However, the wives' participation in the market reduces the time they spend on household work and increases the husband's participation in housework. Thus, while the total time devoted by a working wife to market and household activities far exceeds the man's total production time, men and women's work-share ratios within the domestic sphere are improved: husbands of working wives spend closer to one-half (43 to 46%) as much time as their wives in housework (husbands of non-working wives, only one-fourth or one-fifth).

Data on time devoted by both men and women to market activities do not show that men have greater market participation than women. Single women, in fact, give more time to work than men. Furthermore, in the more urban communities, single women tend to find jobs in lower-level occupations requiring longer hours of work. Among the marrieds, man-woman time in the market is approximately equal, except in the rural areas where wives spend considerably fewer hours in regular employment than men.

The double-dose syndrome becomes clear. While on the whole, husbands and wives devote approximately equal time to market activities, the larger share of working wives in the housework results in unequal conditions; husbands' resulting total production time is only two-thirds to three-fourths that of their wives.

Participation in the public sphere.

More significant findings suggest that unequal participation of men and women in community activities derives from their unequal shares in employment opportunities. Because of their provider role (which, consequently, accounts for their heavy involvement in market activities), men tend to be community organization members more often than women. That market participation is a determinant of organizational membership is supported by the finding that when women work, their organizational membership also increases. Moreover, when women work and remain single at the same time, they become the most active participants in community organizations.

Participation in development benefits.

No significant differences were shown to exist between men's and women's access to this area.

Special Studies

In addition to these pilot study findings, others may be gleaned from special studies conducted in conjunction with the IPC WID research. These studies cover a variety of types of women and development areas in which they are participants.

Aganon and Aganon (1979), for example, investigated men and women managers and workers in women-dominated establishments in Metropolitan Manila. They found that in general, men-women disparities among

workers in terms of working conditions (salaries, benefits, hiring, promotion, and the like) do not exist. However, discrepancies do occur among those occupying supervisory positions. Women do not participate directly in decisions concerning promotions, firing and discipline, setting of wages and fringe benefits, organization and scheduling of work, company plans and programs, and other financial issues. Their role is largely consultative, particularly in providing the data needed for a particular decision. Disparity based on sex is also felt significantly in relation to household chores. While female workers still have chores to perform after work, males do not, thus reinforcing the double-dose syndrome referred to earlier.

Imelda Feranil (1979), using data from a 1975 U.P. Population Institute work force survey, looks at women's work force participation and under-utilization. She finds that while both males and females are economically active, higher participation rates occur among rural men and women as against their urban counterparts, and among males as compared to females. Unemployment rates are highest among urban women.

Hackenberg, Lutes, and Angeles (1979) investigated premarital and postmarital labor force participation among migrant women, using data gathered from three southern Mindanao communities, and among married couples interviewed in a 1977 socio-economic and fertility survey of Region XI. They found that most women are unemployed, i.e., they are unpaid workers confined to household duties, and that women are either absent or under-represented in administrative and executive positions. They also outnumber men in small-scale sales (sari-sari stores and buy and sell) and in teaching. With respect to commercial sales, women's participation is equal to or higher than that of men, but generally limited to low-paying positions. In addition, women earn less than men in certain employment categories. In the matter of postmarital employment, Hackenberg et al. found that premarital employment is an important determinant to postmarital employment. Women married to low-income men are also more likely to be employed, but only if their earning potential is equal to or higher than the husbands', and the woman's occupational status is higher than the man's.

In a study which traces women's work history, Lauby (1979) found that women's participation in the labor force is not interrupted by such events as marriage or childbirth. Neither does the number of children significantly affect women's employment, perhaps due to the easy availability of child care services.

Costello and Costello compare three types of low-skilled working women: domestic help, factory workers, and small-scale business employees. Their findings show those in domestic jobs to have low participation in family and community affairs (e.g., political organizations, health care, the economy) but high participation in religious and neighborhood activities. They also have the greatest access to media facilities, e.g., television, comics, drama, Pilipino movies, largely as a result of their *amo's* lifestyle. Factory workers, on the other hand, have the highest participation in economic activities and voluntary organizations, the best political knowledge, and the greatest use of modern medical facilities. The small-scale workers were found to be in an intermediate position between the domestic help and factory workers.

Finally, Santiago (1979), examining the labor force participation of women in agriculture, finds that females have lower participation in farm activities than males, except in planting, transplanting, and replanting, where male-female participation is about equal. He also finds that females devote more time to non-farm activities, probably because farm jobs are seasonal and there is a need to augment family income. Decisions concerning farm production and the extension of financial aid to relatives are made by the husband, while those pertaining to housekeeping and other household activities are made by the wife.

Research Needs

It should be pointed out that the studies reported in this presentation were done in the lowland Philippines, among women and men who are members of major ethnic groups. It seems that studies of women in the uplands and among minority or tribal groups are sorely lacking. Certainly, work has been done among Muslim women, and mention has been made of the Kalinga or Ifugao women in the works of early missionaries in these areas. Yet there is need for current studies to enable us to understand these women better, to get to know them through their aspirations, expectations, roles, status, and the like.

Angangco (1980) notes the need to look into the woman question more broadly—not simply to describe conditions of women in various situations but to explain these conditions within the context of broader social structures. For instance, while it is worthwhile to know about women's working conditions in the factory, one should also look into the influence of the factory's multinational character on the women, where this is applicable. In a current IPC study of women factory workers,

there is evidence that the non-hiring of women at a point in one factory's existence was a carry-over of Japanese attitudes. It was found that a number of Filipino supervisory personnel had been trained in Japan. In the same manner, while information on working conditions of women in agriculture is enlightening, one should perhaps relate these conditions to the impact of tenurial arrangements, some of which may impose limitations on opportunities and advantages that would otherwise accrue to rural women.

Also needed is cross-cultural (comparative) research, so we can learn from fellow women, particularly our Asian neighbors. While differences undoubtedly exist, there are probably more similarities among us than we realize. Efforts at note-sharing and consultation research on issues confronting women need to be encouraged.

Our review of studies of women also indicates a gap in research of the social-psychological type. How do women feel about their status? What are their worries or problems as women? How do they react to the many issues or situations affecting them? What do they see as their roles, not only in the home, but in the larger society as well? How do they translate these perceptions into reality? We know little about these areas despite the research already conducted.

Finally, studies seem to have concentrated on rural and working women, and those who are not very well educated. Perhaps there is a need to expand this coverage to include professional (middle class?) women, in inquiring into women's participation or nonparticipation in various spheres of activity. A study of the unemployed professional woman would perhaps be particularly revealing.

Tentative Conclusions

These gaps notwithstanding, we have come a long way in terms of empirical research on women in the Philippines. No longer need we speak in broad generalizations and from intuitive knowledge; we may use evidence gleaned from these studies. The varying methodologies and the limitations of these studies, of course, prevent us from generalizing beyond each study's sampling limits. However, when similar patterns consistently emerge despite these constraints, it is hard to escape the conclusion that these common threads are of a more general application. For example, we know from various sources that while Filipino women have access to a variety of opportunities just as their male counterparts do (participation in market activities and decision making in the domestic

sphere), there remain a number of areas where this access or participation is limited, even discouraged. There is evidence that even where men occupy similar types of occupations—e.g., managerial types—a disparity of functions occurs, as when the men participate in direct decision or policy making, while women's participation is limited to sporadic consultations or providing information to male colleagues. Other studies point to inequalities in earnings between men and women who have the same kind of work.

These studies also show that when we speak of "the Filipino woman," we refer not to a single unique being but to several types of beings, each of which presents discernible patterns and trends. Further, that disparities exist not only between men and women but among these various types of women as well. Findings indicate that while the highly-educated urban women have certain advantages over the rural, less-educated women, under certain conditions these positions may also be reversed—we recall the finding that while the highest unemployment rate occurs among women, this is particularly true for urban women.

In short, we know a lot more about Filipino women today than, say, a decade ago. In fact, to some people, the problem is not a dearth of information, but too much information. One representative of a funding agency is supposed to have been overheard complaining that there were too many studies of women nowadays, wondering *why* this had to be.

Perhaps there are "too many" studies of women today, as there probably are "too many" studies of family planning. This does not, however, make continuation of this kind of research undesirable. As pointed out earlier, gaps still exist that need to be filled for a fuller understanding of what we simply call "the woman question." Furthermore, to the extent that information can be accumulated in a relatively objective and systematic fashion, studies of women can present a greater contribution—that of legitimizing minority patterns uplifting to women in this society and others as well. Through this compilation and accumulation of knowledge, environmental sanctions to what may be considered a deviance from societal norms may be lessened or changed.

The strain arising from traditional sex stereotypes has diminished, to be sure, perhaps partly due to research demonstrations that blanket stereotypes are false and that certain work rules can be "demasculinized" or "defeminized." While the idea that certain types of work are physically demanding, dirty, competitive, or ruthless, and therefore not for women, may still prevail in some quarters, there is greater recognition that

women can also participate on men's terms. Further, it seems more clear that work is not simply a matter of physical faculties but of intelligence, judgment, human relations, and such other attributes and skills that are equally possessed by both men and women.

The legitimation process is long and complex. After all, the attitudes, beliefs, ideas, and concepts about women and what they can do are rooted in socialization processes of long duration. Studies of women, geared towards a refutation or clarification of some of these problems, will help speed up the process. Perhaps then we will find women's participation in activities outside of the home and men's participation in activities traditionally assigned to women will no longer be merely the exercise of an option, but will become a duty.

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