

## **Familism and personalism**

Like other social formations of traditional Asia and Europe, Filipino society has, in the post-Cold War era, moved from being a predominantly agricultural society to a modern one. Economic transformations have brought new social changes as the concept of the traditional family continues to be reinvented and transformed. Globalization has created international employment opportunities for migrant workers, especially females, as increasing numbers of Filipinos are "sacrificing" themselves to work abroad to support their families back home. The function of the family changes when a husband and wife are separated for long periods of time. When the wife decides to work overseas and leaves her family behind, it changes the structure at home: Children are cared for by aunts and grandparents, and the husband's traditional role as breadwinner is threatened. Before discussing the dynamic and changing meaning of the concept of the Filipino family, it may be instructive to briefly look at some of the historical transformations that have occurred in Philippine society.

During several centuries of colonization by Spain and the United States, the Philippines produced crops and mined minerals for export and sale on the world market. Since gaining independence in 1946, it has experienced economic growth, decline, and recovery. In the 1960s, neighboring countries perceived it as a showcase for development. At that time, the Philippines had a newly burgeoning middle class and one of the highest literacy rates in the region. However, the economy began to go down when Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law (1972–1981) to prolong his power. Subsequently, the economy entered a period of some positive growth and recovery as Gross National Product (GNP) rates began to increase steadily. The GNP, however, is only a measure of improvements being made at the level of the infrastructure (e.g., increasing rates of electricity being used, new construction, improvements in transportation, increasing numbers of tourists). Consequently, changes in the GNP are not a clear indication that the quality of life for the majority of families has improved.

Politically, the Philippines has long been striving to institute a free and democratic way of life. It was one of the first nations to gain independence from colonial rule. It succeeded in overthrowing an authoritarian dictator (Ferdinand Marcos) in 1987, and it did this through an actively nonviolent people's power revolution. Again, the Philippines peacefully ousted an inept and corrupt president (Joseph Estrada) from office in 2001. Although traditional leading families and new military elites still hold and control powerful governmental posts, a fresh resurgence of people's movements continues from below, supported by nongovernment organizations, calling for a more equitable, just, and democratic society. In the face of these changing circumstances, the Filipino family has proved resilient.

The traditional regime of the Filipino family has been written about before (Mendez and Jocano 1974; Medina 1995; Miralao 1997). Filipinos trace their family relations bilaterally through the mothers' and fathers' lines. Relations between husbands and wives, and between men and women generally, tend to be more egalitarian in the Philippines than in many other cultures and societies. This may be because the Philippines was a matrilineal society before being colonized by Spain (1565–1898) and the United States (1898–1946). The precolonial family line was traced through the female side of the family, while males inherited their political titles and followings from their mother's brother. The close

relationships between brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, and men and women in general, are typically filled with dignity, protectiveness, and respect. Although the male-centered colonization processes effected some significant changes in the traditional gender regime, Filipino women in comparison to their Euro-American counterparts have enjoyed a relatively high status that can be traced to these early beginnings.

According to Paz Policarpio Mendez and F. Landa Jocano (1974), the traditional Filipino family acknowledges the importance of both consanguineal (blood) and affinal (marriage) ties. Ritual kinship in terms of godparents is recognized as being special because it is embedded in the Filipino community, although the Spanish introduced the practice. Consanguineal or biological ties, however, remain by far the most important relations. The blood bond is so close that even distant relatives are recognized. Mendez and Jocano found that some rural Filipinos, when choosing friends and possible spouses, carefully examined genealogies to assess virtues and shortcomings because they believed that a person's hereditary character shows. Belen Medina (1995) found that blood bonds are so important, traditionally, that a person can be judged on the basis of who her or his relatives are. It follows that parents and children share an exceptionally strong and intimate bond. They give each other much mutual affection and respect. Children are taught by their parents to be gentle and deferential to elders, and this is carried on after they get married.

Gelia Castillo and Juanito Pua (1963, p. 116) classify the Filipino family as "residentially nuclear but functionally extended." This means that the household tends to be nuclear in form, but the family is extended in so far as relationships among members of the wider kin group are concerned. Members of the same kin group assist one another in times of need, and they participate in joint family activities even if they do not live together in the same household.

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. The family household may include grandparents, an unmarried aunt, an uncle, a cousin, a niece, or a nephew. Medina suggested that by the end of the twentieth century, the Filipino nuclear family household was more commonly found in the rural areas than in the cities. This is because it is quite expensive for a typical Filipino 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 barrio setting. These simple homes are considered by many educated Filipinos today to be elegant and environmentally attuned. This appreciation for traditional dwellings was not the case during the American colonial and postcolonial period when concrete homes with corrugated steel roofs were introduced to replace them. Also, in rural communities, kin members can build their household dwellings close to each other, which may not be possible 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) following Johan Gultang (1995) examines the transformation of Philippine society in relation to modernization theories that were first introduced by the sociologists Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. These evolutionary models posited that as

societies modernize, social relationships become more impersonal and businesslike. At the same time, Durkheim and Weber characterized modern societies as being less religiously oriented and more scientifically grounded. Philippine society, however, does not work in accordance with Western-derived notions of modernization, although such models continue to dominate development circles. Although society is indeed becoming characterized by more impersonal relationships, popular religious and social movements for an alternative, holistic development paradigm are widespread and growing stronger. Moreover, the modern Filipino family continues to be close knit and centered on the family. Relationships among extended kin continue to be marked by reciprocal obligations and privileges even across great geographic distances.

Familism and personalism are all-pervasive in Philippine society. Filipinos typically try to make their friendships into family-like relationships that are mutually supportive. They prefer to have smooth interpersonal relationships with one another and go out of their way to create an atmosphere in which the people around them feel comfortable and accepted. Filipinos generally try to avoid confrontations and make use of indirect speech and mediators in situations of potential conflict. As elsewhere in Asia, 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.

Filipino parents consider it their duty to provide for the material and educational needs of their children. Children, in turn, are expected to obey and respect their parents and to take care of their parents when they grow old. Also, older children, until they marry and have families of their own, are expected to help younger siblings with school, and to assist them in getting a job after graduation.

Beginning in the 1970s, the Philippine government implemented an overseas employment program to absorb the increasing numbers of Filipino workers. This has led to new conceptualizations of the Filipino family and changing gender roles, as many married females have decided to migrate abroad to work, and their husbands stay home to care for the children. Today, most Filipino families are maintaining and reproducing transnational household connections and networks. The Filipino family continues to be adaptive and functional in these new and changing circumstances.

Ref.: <http://family.jrank.org/pages/1277/Philippines.html>