

PATRIARCHY AND WOMEN'S SUBORDINATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

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The Concept of Patriarchy

There are many ways by which various groups define patriarchy but a common denominator is the focus on men's power, authority and dominance over women. Patriarchy is therefore loosely defined as male culture or ideology, male choice, male bonding and male political interests in dominating women as producers and reproducers.¹

Patriarchy is historically developed. It started with the appropriation by men of women's sexual and reproductive capacity even prior to the formation of private property and class society but its commodification evolved with private property.²

Ann Ferguson elaborates that the origins, the persistence and historical reproduction of male dominance remain as feminist theoretical questions. She illustrates the historical evolution of the concept of patriarchy in the United States in these phases:

- **Father patriarchy:** during the colonial period, it was reproduced by the fathers' legal and economic control of children's marriages and inheritance through family property which rested in sons, not daughters.
- **Husband patriarchy:** during the Victorian period, it was reproduced by the institution of "family wage" which was rested in husbands who were the family breadwinners.
- **Public patriarchy:** it was reproduced by modes of sex/affective production characteristic of modern industrial states,

¹ Thanh Dam Truong, *Sex, Money and Morality -- The Political Economy of Prostitution and Tourism in Southeast Asia* (University of Amsterdam, 1988), p. 100.

² Gerda Lerner, "Origins: A Working Hypothesis" in *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 6.

whether capitalist or state socialist states-- through an unequal division of family wage and unwaged labour, through the relative power in family decision making that their higher paid wage labour brings, through domestic violence, and through public mechanisms of the patriarchal welfare state: gender segregation of wage labour, state controls over women's physical and mental health and biological reproduction, and the exploitation of all mothers' unpaid child rearing labour, mass media's stereotyping and sexual objectification of women in the context of sexual consumerism.³

In contemporary society, patriarchy is a deeply entrenched and integrated system of male dominance. It has built itself into the structures of society and the consciousness of men and women. Chhachhi identifies three areas where patriarchal control over women is manifested: in women's biological reproduction or sexuality, in women's labor and in the consciousness or patriarchy as ideology.⁴

Lacanian feminists identify two semi-autonomous domination systems in advanced industrial societies which perpetuate male dominance—capitalism as the mode—of economic production, and patriarchy, the mode of ideological reproduction.

Capitalism perpetuates the ideology of the natural biological, patriarchal nuclear family as the superior form of family and household organization this arrangement, women's second shift and unpaid domestic labor provides the most reliable and the cheapest way to reproduce the labor force it needs to reproduce itself. Patriarchy, on the other hand, is perpetual, not primarily through ideological beliefs about the natural role of women in the family, but through the structure of unconscious desires that are tied to gender identity through early childhood experiences.⁵

Socialist feminists call this the dual system theory where the partnership of patriarchy and capital which set up a social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hier-

³ Ann Ferguson, *Blood at the Root: Motherhood, Sexuality and Male Dominance* (London: Pandora Press), pp. 101-102.

⁴ Amrita Chhachhi, "Concepts in Feminist Theory -- Consensus and Controversy" in *Gender in Caribbean Development* ed. Mahomed and Shepherd (UWI, Sept. 1986), p. 8.

⁵ Ferguson, p. 36.

archical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women.⁶

The household is identified as the primary site for the reproduction or perpetuation of patriarchy. The concept of household is interchangeably used with the concepts of the "family" or "domestic unit" as constituting one of the basic institutions of the capitalist world economy. Martin and Beittel⁷ expounds the concept of "household" as the unit that ensures the continued reproduction of labor through organizing the consumption of a collective fund of material goods -- a unit therefore different from the family, co-resident dwelling groups and kinship structures. The household may encompass these units, or be structured along their lines but it may also not and so is not identifiable with them. The resources that may be pooled into the household's collective consumptions may be categorized as follows:

- wage income;
- consumable goods produced within the boundaries of the household;
- income from the market sale of goods;
- rent (from land, animals, money, etc.)
- transfer payments (gifts, subsidies, etc.)

In contemporary patriarchal societies, the household has evolved into the "primary domain" of women but where they remain powerless and marginalized especially with regards to decision making and the access to and control of resources. It is also the area where they are most effectively exploited and subordinated in their unpaid domestic labor and undervalued production (e.g. subcontracting and homeworking) for the capitalist market.

Patriarchy in Philippine Society

Patriarchy, as a framework, is relevant in analyzing the subordinated position of women in the Philippines. The socialist feminists view is especially useful in viewing the oppression of Filipino women as a result of the integration of patriarchal and capitalist power systems.

⁶ Ferguson, p. 26.

⁷ Martin and Beittel, p.218.

Colonialism and the Development of Patriarchy

Research on the status of indigenous Filipino women before Spanish colonization reveals that they enjoyed a high status in society. There was equal value given to male and female offspring. Women participated in the decision-making processes not only in the home but in the important social processes of the bigger community. They had equal access to production resources and had equal "inheritance rights" to usufruct rights over communal property. They received an equal opportunity for education; they enjoyed the same liberty of movement as men. They had equal rights with regards to divorce before the law. They occupied leadership roles as the men in the political and religious fields.⁸

Maranan⁹ expounds that local pre-Hispanic economies were geared for social use and to fulfil certain kinship obligations. There was no centralized system of the means of production and the family as a self-sufficient subsistence unit of production and consumption. Thus there was no need to create relations of dependence nor of exploitation. Since the concept of private property still was to come with Spanish conquest, the concept of woman as property of a man had no social basis for existing. However, the early forms of feudalism had started to take root in some communities, and class structures had germinated and were well on their way to full development. This was happening in some economically progressive and more politically consolidated riverine and coastal kingdoms which had more production surplus, had more barter trade contacts with foreign traders, and in some areas, had become Muslim sultanates. In these communities, the women had become part of social and productive relations which had need for dependence and exploitation.

The Spanish conquest facilitated the transition from pre-feudal relations. Communal lands became private reserves. While debt peonage and sharecropping had their origins in pre-conquest period, it was the colonization process that institutionalized these socio-economic phenomena.

Within the context of these developments, the transformation of women from highly respected equals of men to objects of subjugation began. When the Spanish masters brought in their institutions

⁸ Sr. Mary John Mananzan, "The Filipino Woman: Before and After the Spanish Conquest of the Philippines" in *Essays on Filipino Women* ed. Mary John Mananzan (Manila: St. Scholastica's College, 1987), pp. 7-36

⁹ Aida Maranan, "Do Women Really Hold Up Half the Sky?" in *Essays on Filipino Women* (Manila: St. Scholastica's College, 1987), pp. 38-39.

and transplanted them on native soil, the social being of women was invested with new meanings, new dimensions.

The "new" Filipina (or female Indio) was now her father's meek daughter, her husband's faithful subject, the Church's obedient servant, and before her marriage, a chaste virgin who would yield only to her husband (and occasionally to the friar). But of course, like her peasant husband, she was also a slavelike toiler who worked the rich man's and his descendants' land for pittance...¹⁰

This colonial legacy was more effectively systematized even later as the next colonizers, the Americans, increasingly linked and made the local economy dependent on the world capitalist market. A significant portion of agricultural production was allocated to export crops such as coconut, sugar, tobacco, abaca and later fruits grown in multinational farms (pineapple, banana) or in contracted farms (mango). Many more Filipino peasants and their families were dispossessed of their lands through various means--from outright landgrabbing, to usury and new legalities of land ownership of which the peasants were unaware. The traditional self-sufficiency of the Filipino rural households (usually an extended kinship system) gave way to nuclear families dependent on male wage earners who worked mostly as landless peasants, as factory and office workers, or at other low-paying jobs. Many families migrated from the farms to urban centers and constituted the urban poor population congesting the slum communities.

The historical process of colonialism, feudalism and capitalism led to the class division of Filipino society and to the sexual division of labor, and the gender subordination of women in the home and public work places. It also gave rise to the dual economy of stagnating countrysides and glittery cities where factories and facilities are concentrated. It also left well-entrenched socio-political structures which perpetuate colonial values, elitist rule and inequities in power and wealth distribution.

Specifically, the subordinate position of Filipino women is the result of the merging of patriarchal and capitalist interests dominating the country. The major areas of women's subordination are manifested as follows.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 39.

Patriarchy as Control Over Women's Sexuality

Religion, specifically Roman Catholicism, was introduced by the Spanish colonizers to facilitate their rule over the local people, especially to neutralize the influence of independent women at that time. Mananzan writes "Her freedom of choice in important aspects of her life was curtailed by the imposition of new laws and mores. Confined in her area of action, the woman poured all her innate sensibility and energy into the activities allowed her, developing a religious fervor which would verge on fanaticism. She was constantly reminded of her innate danger to men as the seductive Eve and was relentlessly exhorted to follow an impossible model--the Virgin Mother. She would venerate her but her efforts to emulate her brought her into scrupulous, frustrated efforts which ended up in giving her an abiding guilt complex which added to her timidity and lack of self-confidence and in many cases reducing her to frigidity.

"On the pretext of putting woman on a pedestal, as an object of veneration and adoration, patriarchal society succeeded in alienating her from public life, public decisions, public significance. She would henceforth be a delicate ornament of the home or the victim of the convent,"¹¹

Monogamous marriage and chastity were inculcated alongside the institutionalization of property ownership. The Filipino woman then became subordinate to a male figure: her father before marriage, her husband after marriage. Under Philippine laws, a woman below 23 years of age cannot leave the parental home without the consent of her parents except when she marries, exercises her profession or when either parent enters into subsequent marriage. During the marriage ceremony which should be solemnized by a priest, the father marches down the aisle with the bride to give her away to the groom at the foot of the altar.

Upon marriage, the woman adopts her husband's last name. Until the adoption of the new family code in 1987, the primary authority in the home was the husband. He decided on the choice of family residence. He was the legal administrator of conjugal as well as the children's property. In case of disagreement on parental authority, the husband had the upperhand. The wife could not accept expensive gifts, except from relatives, and could not make expensive purchases without the husband's consent. The husband could object to the exercise of the wife's profession if he could support the family sufficiently. Fidelity and sexual exclusivity are highly expected. the husband however can more easily accuse his wife of

¹¹ Mananzan, pp. 35-36.

adultery but the wife has to catch the husband in the sexual act and prove that he is supporting and maintaining another woman to be able to accuse him of concubinage. When the marital relations indeed prove to be incompatible, legal separation may be obtained but not divorce. Just recently and as a result of the lobbying done by the women's movement, the new Family Code repealed most of these onerous anti-woman provisions but still, a few remain such as on parental authority and non-divorce. The public consciousness, implementation and affirmative action on these new laws are still another matter.

Motherhood is a great expectation of the married woman. At this point, the adage of the old patriarchal system is reflected -- "women as the nurturers of men's seed, the soil in which seeds grow, and the daughters who bear them offspring"¹². Barrenness on the part of the wife may be a ground for separation or an excuse for the husband's infidelity.

But motherhood can only be accepted within marriage. Unwed mothers and children out of wedlock are a social disgrace and suffer social ostracism. Premarital sex is even taboo especially for a single woman whose "greatest gift" to her husband is her virginity. On the other hand, it is deemed natural that bachelor men are sexually adventurous to prove themselves and gain experience.

Sex is generally considered dirty and taboo as a subject for discussion, hence it has not been squarely tackled until recently. Adolescents are often left out of sex education, thus the incidence of teen-age pregnancies. In the case of teen-age pregnancies, marriage is usually the solution even if the parties concerned are not prepared for the responsibilities.

The Catholic church does not allow the use of artificial contraceptives and strongly advocates against abortion. Women who at the outset are ignorant of and lack control of their sexuality, bear the brunt of this imposition when they bear many children. The average size of Filipino families has recently gone down from eight to six. This was after some years of intensive population control campaign undertaken by the government with World Bank support. This confuses the Filipino women who, on one hand, are caught up in their Catholic values and, on the other hand, are pressured by the state to surrender or control their reproductive capacities in favor of the "national interest". In peddling family planning, it was never considered in the light of the women's informed choice of the advantages

¹² Barbara Katz Rothman, "Women as Fathers: Motherhood and Childcare Under a Modified Patriarchy" in *Gender and Society* 3:1:89-104.

and the risks of artificial contraception as well as women's control of their own bodies.

Motherhood, while biological, has also its social expectations. In Philippine society, this relegates the role of women to child bearers, child-carers and housekeepers. The home befits the woman because of her nurturance instincts and skills brought about by motherhood. The care of the children and the husband is the woman's primary responsibility and at some point, is considered her greatest contribution to humanity. This romanticism camouflages the physical hardship and emotional strain that go with motherhood.

The health of women in a poor country like the Philippines is affected most seriously by their crucial roles as child-bearers and child-rearers. Women get trapped in the vicious cycle of pregnancy, childbirth, lactation, malnutrition, infections, fatigue and stress in the course of their performance of their multiple roles as mothers, workers and health providers. Thus, they generally suffer from poor health, with a maternal mortality of 100 per 100,000 live births and a high incidence of anemia and goiter among those who are pregnant. Their condition is aggravated by the inadequacy of the health care delivery system and the lack of trained health personnel to attend to them and their children. Women are the target consumers of food, drug and cosmetic manufacturers who have recently been criticized for their production of non-essential drugs which pose serious threats to women's and their families' health.¹³

Patriarchal and capitalist control over women's sexuality also means treating women as sex objects especially in mass media. Women are advertised alongside commodities. Women are commodities themselves especially in their role as prostitutes to lure tourists, as subservient mail-order brides or as lively entertainers abroad.

Patriarchy as Control Over Women's Labor

Patriarchal control over women's sexuality also leads to control over women's labor. Women's marginalization in the home and their preoccupation in unpaid domestic labor gives them very limited option to engage in work outside the home. The latest estimates indicate that only 36% of the population 15 years and over who are in the labor force are women; 74% of these women are housekeepers or those who enable other members of the family to engage in productive work outside the home but whose contributions remain unrecognized.¹⁴

¹³ *Philippine Development Plan for Women 1989-1992*, p.8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

The major issue in fact is how and why domestic labor came to be and continues to be regarded as less productive work and are unremunerated reproduction/subsistence/private production, as it is variably called, secondary only to work outside the home which is paid "economic"/public production activities.¹⁵ It should now be clearly recognized that mothering and domestic labor performed by women in the household are exploited to subsidize capitalist production.

Work outside the home does not also result in liberation because jobs are also sex-stereotyped. Most of the jobs that are open to women are usually extensions of the mothering, caring and educating roles that they do at home: teachers, nurses, midwives, social workers, salesladies, vending and other odd jobs in the service sector. In the past two decades, women workers were lured to export-oriented manufacturing industries for their "nimble fingers" such as in electronics and garments as well as for their docility in toeing the company rules and accepting low wages.

Filipino women comprise a low 36% of all employed persons and 41% of all unemployed. As workers, they tend to occupy the lower positions. In 1988, they represented only 25% of those holding managerial and executive jobs. Women generally get lower pay. This situation has often been attributed to women's employment in lower-skill job categories, shorter work hours because of multiple responsibilities and possession of lower level of skills, training and experience.¹⁶

The lack of opportunities and unfavorable work conditions at home lure women to overseas employment mostly as domestic helpers and entertainers. This exposes women to greater dangers such as sexual exploitation and physical abuse. While it also presents a serious threat to their well being, dignity and status before the world, to the family as an institution and to national self-respect, the government somehow encourages overseas employment because of the foreign exchange they bring to the debt-ridden economy.

Despite the increase of women's participation in the labor force, they do not enjoy comparable employment opportunities, privileges and benefits as men. Working women are also left open to displacement and marginalization by large firms and subjected to

¹⁵ See Lourdes Beneria, "Conceptualizing the Labor Force: The Underestimation of Women's Economic Activities" in *African Women in the Development Process* ed. N. Nelson (London : Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 1981), pp. 10-28; Maria Mies, "Capitalist Development and Subsistence Production: Rural Women in India" in *Women: The Last Colony* ed. Mies et. al (Zed Books, Ltd, 1988).

¹⁶ *Philippine Development Plan for Women*, 1989, p. 6.

many regulatory policies by government. Their contribution to housework and the informal economy usually go unrecorded in standard labor force accounts and simply form part of unpaid family labor.

Patriarchy as Ideology

Patriarchy is deeply ingrained in the consciousness of Filipino men and women through the socialization process they got from the various social institutions -- the family religion, the educational system, mass media and the sciences.

Biological determinism is used to explain the strength and dominance of men and the gentleness and weakness of women. Christianity explains this in the myth that Eve was created only from Adam's short rib so that women are naturally subordinate to men. Male strength rationalizes their appropriation of superior public, economic, high wage-earning roles. Women's physical weakness and emotional sensitivity come with motherhood instincts hence their appropriate roles in related jobs and professions. These beliefs are reinforced by the social sciences such as in sociobiology, structural functionalism and psychoanalysis.

These ideology and roles are inculcated starting at home with childrearing. From childhood, human beings are socialized into stereotypical roles and personality traits. Daughters imbibe an entire view of culture and society, aspirations are bound by motherhood functions, and dispositions are molded in accordance with the masculine/feminine dichotomy.

These are reinforced in religion, school and mass media. The influence of religion since the onset of colonization has been explained earlier. These social mores are likewise reflected and sanctioned in formal laws and policy legislations, some provisions of which were already used as illustrations. In formal education, there is the widespread sex bias in textbooks, curricula and instructional materials and even among teachers themselves. In the non-formal education such as media, women are portrayed as sex objects, housewives or domestics or persons whose main goal is to attract men and be dependent on them. They are likewise seen as victims of violence as battered wives, as sexually-abused single or married women or young girls and as prostitutes.

The perpetuation of the patriarchal ideology may be put in subtle, quaint and appealing forms such as in this popularized song about two famous personalities in Philippine politics.

I HAVE FALLEN IN LOVE (With the Same Woman Three Times)

From the poem written by Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino, Jr. for his wife, now President Corazon C. Aquino, at Fort Bonifacio on October 11, 1973 for their 19th wedding anniversary.

I have fallen in love with the same woman three times
In a day spanning nineteen years of tearful joys and joyful
tears I loved her first when she was young, enchanting and
vibrant, eternally new
She was brilliant, fragrant and cool as the morning dew.
I fell in love with her the second time
When first she bore her child and mine
She's always by my side the source of my strength
Helping to turn the tide.
But there were candles to burn, the world was my concern
While our home was her domain.
And the people were mine
While the children were hers to maintain.
So it was in those eighteen years and a day
Till I was detained, forced in prison to stay
Suddenly she's our sole support
Source of comfort, our wellspring of hope,
On her shoulders fell the burden of life.
I fell in love again with the same woman the third time.
Looming from the battle, her courage will never fade.
Amidst the hardships she has remained, undaunted and un-
afraid.
She is calm and composed.
She is God's lovely maid.

Conclusion

Patriarchy, as manifested in various forms and practices in the socio-economic and political fabric of Philippine society, has to be unmasked as a basic problem of underdevelopment alongside the issues of feudalism, imperialism and bureaucrat capitalism. A patriarchal culture prevents men and women from genuinely working together as equals in liberating society from capitalist exploitation.

Consciousness-raising and organizing efforts in social movements such as non-governmental organizations and especially the women's movement should systematically take up the issue of patriarchy in its work with the grassroots as well as in advocacy for alternative policies and programs.