

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE FILIPINO WOMAN*

Sylvia Estrada-Claudio

Does the psychology of the Filipino, of the Filipino woman in particular, play a role in the values formation that feminists would find meaningful? To answer this question, we have to examine the role of science in society. Psychology is a science, whether some consider it a social science, or others consider it a natural science.

As science, Psychology inherits a logico-positivist approach to reality, tradition that is alleged neutral or objective. In this tradition, a psychologist's role is chiefly to depict or describe the behaviors, actions and feelings of people. The psychologist does not decide on whether a society or a person's behaviors, actions and feelings are good or bad—he/she does not pass judgment. If others should decide to change or encourage certain behaviors or traits, the psychologist's role is comparable only to that of a technician or consultant. He/she only gives advice to the individual, family or society on how to change unpleasant behavior or encourage desirable ones.

Many feminists have descried against this traditional scientific approach. According to them, logico-positivism hides the patriarchal motives of science behind the mask of objectivism. Feminists of course do not stand alone in this critique. They come from a stream of adversarial traditions to logico-positivism. There exists, after all, alternative philosophies of science that arose out of a reaction to the role of logico-positivism as defender and perpetrator of the status quo.

I expect that through a discussion of feminists strivings in the field of psychology, we can expand the discussion today to the role that science plays in supporting feminist objectives in the Philippines. We must substantiate this through discussion about the philosophy and the characteristics of a science that does not avoid the truth that science, wittingly or unwittingly, is biased towards the perpetuation of certain goals and ideologies.

*Revised and translated from the keynote paper in Filipino delivered at a UCWS Seminar on "Constructing Feminist Values" on March 6, 1990.

Feminist Critique of Western Psychology

The initial critiques of Western models from a feminist viewpoint has, in fact, come from Western feminist themselves. As early as the 1940s one of feminism's great theoretical mothers, Simone de Beauvoir,¹ sought to explain gender oppression in the light of existentialist philosophy. She postulated that in the eternal schism between subject and object, men had trapped women into the role of object. The world itself had been divided into the areas of subjectivity (civilization, culture, statecraft and the like) and objectivity (nature, biology). Women had been barred from all that human civilization could offer because they were barred from being subjects in their own right. De Beauvoir's call was visionary: women must enter into subjectivity. It is a call that, to my mind, has not greatly influenced the schools of psychology that have arisen out of the cradle of existentialist psychology.

But let me skip a few decades and take us to the American continent in the interest of brevity and relevance to us who are more greatly influenced by US academic and clinical traditions. In the early 1960s the US feminist movement acquired new vigor with the publication of the book *The Feminine Mystique*² by Betty Friedan. The book spoke of the malaise of millions of US housewives for whom the role of being housewife and mother was proving sterile. The hardsell of the prevailing culture which sought to convince women that their "true nature" was fulfilled by the satisfactions of being housewife and mother was exposed for what is was -- a myth foisted on women by a consumerist and male-oriented society. The dream was empty. Women were in despair over their role as free household laborers and brainless consumers of useless commodities. *The Feminine Mystique* was an exposition of a psychological problem to which thousands of US women responded.

The publication of neo-Freudian Karen Horney's book *Feminine Psychology*³ in 1967 was a culmination of her own rebellion against Freud, much of which had to do with disagreements over the psychosexual development of women. Horney was the first to postulate a counterpart to the concept of penis envy. By this

¹Beauvoir, S. *The Second Sex*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, Inc. 1952.

²Friedan, B. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Norton: Dell Publishing Co. Inc. 1963.

³Horney, K. *Feminine Psychology*. New York: Norton, 1967.

Horney meant that men were envious of women's primal creativity in reproduction. In envy men created laws, statecraft, arts and industry and jealously guarded these fields against women.

By early 1970, dissatisfaction with traditional psychology and psychiatry had begun in "official circles". One example is a paper presented by Phyllis Kestler (1970) at the annual convention of the American Psychological Society. The paper entitled "Patient and Patriarch: Women in the Psychotherapeutic Relationship"⁴ discussed several broad issues. Among these issues were: a critique of the sexism in several personality theories; a questioning of clinical practice as essentially recapitulating exploitative male-female relationships between female patient and male physician; a critique of the patriarchal mindset of the medical model and its approach to women's problems; an analysis of male domination in the fields of psychology and psychiatry.

Grassroots Movement and the Feminist Agenda

Such critiques were occurring in the light of a grassroots movement that saw the rise of health collectives run by women that often brought good results despite the absence of professional expertise. Rape crisis centers, women's groups which dealt with family violence, consciousness raising groups, were the numerous and visible components of a strong grassroots movement of women dealing with their own psychological concerns. This movement which continues to grow today and has definitely become an international phenomenon has been the source of much intellectual ferment and redefinition.

This ferment continues as women attempt to discover their own definitions in the context of their struggle against oppression. In this redefinition Freud was crucified, buried, resurrected and at the moment still awaits final judgment as to whether his theory can be put to good use without falling into sexism.⁵ All other theories of personality were and continue to be subjected to such scrutiny and reformulated to fit women's concerns. This has culminated in major attempts at fashioning entirely new theories.

⁴Kestler, P. "Patient and Patriarch: Women in the Psychotherapeutic Relationship" in *Women in Sexist Society*, Gordick and Moran (eds). New York: Basic Books, Inc. 1971.

⁵Those interested in the resurrection of Freud by feminist writers should see Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. London: Allen Lane, 1974.

Because of all this, in both the grassroots organizations and the universities, a feminist agenda for psychological study is emerging. It has become evident that we must expand our interest in female sexuality beyond the norms of the adult, heterosexual and genital which have been dictated by tradition. Gender roles, differences in socialization and the detrimental effects of gender stereotyping have also come under study. Numerous studies have been conducted in an attempt to discover gender differences. What is more, these differences are disappearing as the women's movement impacts on gender roles. This despite repeated attempts by the patriarchal status quo to establish difference due to gender as fundamental.

Women's unique capability in the sphere of reproduction has also been explored as a key to the female psyche even as women have rejected strictly biological explanations for their uniqueness and oppression.

The functioning of the family has also been examined. Often-times women have discovered that the ideal of a happy and protective family is a myth that obscures violence against women and children. While the home may be a man's castle, it is often enough a place of pain and drudgery for women and children. Women have exposed the underlying violence in male-female that finds its epitome in pornography and rape.

Filipino Psychology and the Psychology of the Filipino Woman

But if this agenda seems overwhelming, we must remember that we, as women in a Third World country, are only now beginning to add our voices to the discourse. Sikolohiyang Pilipino must seek to elucidate the impact of the elements of race, national oppression, class and sex on the construction of the female in Philippine culture.

Since the early 1970s there has been a strong movement in this University to establish a Sikolohiyang Pilipino, Filipino psychology. By this is meant a psychology that is based on the ways, thought, experience, goals and culture of our people.

Sikolohiyang Pilipino arose from the realization that the study of Psychology in our schools is not suited to our society, because it has been imposed upon us by American colonialism. Traditional and Western Psychology has bastardized the indigenous culture and consciousness of Filipinos in the Philippines. This was replaced by a worship of American culture and consciousness. West-

ern psychology marginalized the behaviors and qualities of our people that are revolutionary and nationalistic and established instead those that are subservient and dependent. Sikolohiyang Pilipino has also criticized the elitism of western psychology. But it is not only colonialism and elitism that are bred by the uninhibited importation of psychological theories and methods from the West, because these theories are also sexist.

We can see such sexism (and racism) in the earliest studies of US psychologists here such as the one which attempted to find a correlation between IQ and breast size among Igorot women.

Based on comprehensive reviews⁶ of the various studies done on Filipino personality from the 1800s up to the present, clear patterns emerge:

- 1) a tendency to trivialize our traits as a people and to downgrade our values and beliefs, while this is true for the entire people it is especially true of women.
- 2) a tendency to obscure the oppression of women by making it appear that they are powerful in our families; by making it seem that those of us who work are happy with the double burden of career, children and housework; by stating outright, often without much evidence, that women occupy a high and respected position in society.

Feminist Psychology in the Philippines: A New Synthesis

In my opinion, the beginnings of Sikolohiyang Pilipino have been auspicious precisely because it has not avoided the necessity of establishing nationalist and pro-people objectives; it takes the stand that this kind of orientation is good for a scientific study of psychology in the Philippines.

However, feminism has only slightly influenced Sikolohiyang Pilipino. Be that as it may, from my perspective, only the conjunction of nationalist aims and feminism can draw the appropriate picture of the psychology of the Filipino. Only through this collabo-

⁶I refer to the following reviews of literature: Lawless, R. "An Evaluation of Filipino Culture and Personality Research," Manila: Asian Center Monograph Series, No. 3, 1969; Church, T. "Filipino Personality: A Review of Research and Writings," Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1985; Aguilar, D. "The Social Construction of the Filipino Woman," in *The Feminist Challenge: Initial Working Principles Towards Reconceptualizing the Feminist Movement in the Philippines*, Manila: Asian Social Institute, 1988. Aguilar's essay is noteworthy for its critique of research on Filipino women.

ration can the Filipino psychology address the inextricably linked influences of social class, race, and gender vis-a-vis the general psychology.

Let me give an example to show feminism's contribution to Filipino psychology. In a forum sponsored by the University Center for Women's Studies (UCWS) recently, the scale of relations by Santiago and Virgilio Enriquez was mentioned. There are eight grades along the scale, from the lowest of superficial relationship (pakikitungo) to the deepest bond of "oneness" (pakikiisa). Fifth on the scale is "pakikisama" which refers to participation or joining in social activities out of friendship, for future benefit or because of the call of the times. According to Raquel Edralin Tiglao who was also at the forum, it seemed that "pakikisama" takes on another meaning from the feminist perspective, especially when used by men to impose a sexual relation. Tiglao also warned against the possibility of a different meaning attached by either gender to the word "pakikisama". For men it could mean that they would expect favors in exchange, but for women, they understand this to mean cooperation for the good of others.

Construction and Deconstruction

The discovery of female psychology is a project that encroaches on other endeavors. As a first step, to be free from oppression, (i.e., in the construction of feminist values) we must determine the roots of the psychological oppression of women in the Philippines. Therefore it is important to look into history for the origin of concepts about female psychology. There has been little study done in this field so far.

One example is the study of Carolyn Medel Añonuevo⁷ who explains that much of the self concept of women today can be traced to the attempts by colonizing Spanish Catholic Church to define Filipino women.

According to Añonuevo, Spanish friars gave the Filipina only two role models around which to structure the self: "the virginal martyr and mother role of Mary or the evil woman that the seductress Magdalene was portrayed to be."

The ideal woman as portrayed stood for three characteristics of the ideal woman: virginal until married, fertile when married and

⁷Añonuevo, Carol M. Ideology and Cultural Practice. Unpublished Document, 1990.

long-suffering until death. The latter trait of long suffering resulted, according to Añonuevo, in the "non-complaining and silenced Filipina. A complex culture of martyrdom and silence moulded young women into believing that they have to accept all the trials and hardships without question."

As Añonuevo believes that these cultural symbols still strongly influence present day realities, we may well keep these traits in mind when we deal with raped and battered women whom we must help to break the bonds of their silence. Certainly any attempt to empower raped and battered women must effectively deal with this culture of martyrdom and silence.

Stereotypical patterns of weakness, passivity, martyrdom and inferiority were documented by Jimenez⁸ in 1983. Obviously a case can be made that this is indeed the psyche that Filipino women now have, after years of colonialist and sexist manipulation.

The Challenge of Reconstruction

The exposition of the construction of the psychology of the oppressed is however only the first step in our attempt to construct feminist values. It is more important to discover the psychology of resistance. The construction of reality within a society is always based on two opposing forces with two different goals, namely, the use of force by the ruling class and the resistance of the ruled. In post-structuralist philosophy that posits an alternative to the logico-positivist tradition, the first important step is deconstruction. What I mean here is an exposure of the alliances and formations that constitute the oppressive discourse regarding women.

A real challenge to feminists however, their most important task, is reconstruction--the search for cultural elements that will serve as the bases for a liberating psychology. An important key to reconstruction is the creation of a feminist psychology. At present, there are only few studies we can mention.

La Rainne Abad-Sarmiento⁹ has taken up several issues relating to sexuality with women from selected organizations. She then looked at the data from the basis of class. Her findings show that women in general lack the necessary information and attitudes

⁸Jimenez, C. Si Malakas at Maganda. Doctoral dissertation. University of the Philippines, 1983.

⁹Abad-Sarmiento, L. Pamamahala ng Seksualidad sa Kaso ng Kababaihang Kabilang sa Ilang Piling Organisasyon: Isang Panimulang Pag-aaral. MA thesis. University of the Philippines, 1990

that would allow them sovereignty over their own sexuality. Yet Abad-Sarmiento also found that there were differences in women's concept and experiences of sexuality across class. More importantly, there was a noticeable difference in the information and attitudes held by women who were working in feminist women's organizations.

In a recent paper¹⁰ I have attempted to trace elements of female psychology in the psychology of local religious groups. I believe as does Z. Salazar¹¹, that indigenous religious groups come from a long tradition of resistance against colonialism. I have however added that given the predominance of women as psychological/spiritual healers before the coming of the Spanish, feminist traditions were also likely to be found in the thinking and psychology of these indigenous religious groups. I did in fact find a strong female element and aspects of thinking and feeling that correspond to recent research findings on the psychology of women by Western feminist scholars like C. Gilligan¹² and M.F. Belenky, et al.¹³ The merging of nationalistic and women-centered images in these groups requires further study and elucidation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to summarize the main ideas of this paper:

First, the objective of constructing feminist values points to the need to renounce a western tradition of patriarchal science that puts a premium value on the myth of objectivity. In the field of Psychology as science, we have to assert the scientific basis of a perspective that is ready to question the oppressive role of colonialism, racism, sexism and elitism in the construction of the psychological reality of the Filipino.

¹⁰Estrada-Claudio, S. Ang Sikolohiya ng Kababaihan sa Sikolohiyang Pangrelihiyon ng Pilipino. Unpublished document, 1990.

¹¹Salazar, Z. "Four Filiations of Filipino Psychology", *Sikolohiyang Pilipino: Isyu, Pananaw at Kaalaman*. Manila: National Bookstore, 1985.

¹²Gilligan, C. *In a Different Voice*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1982.

¹³Belenky, M.F., Clinchy, B.M., Golberger, N.R., Tarule, J.M. *Women's Ways of Knowing*. New York: Basic Books, Inc. 1986.

Second, while we are in the process of deconstructing the ideology of the oppressor, we also have to find the elements of resistance that will be the basis of a liberating psychology of women.

This points imply a responsibility on the part of psychologists. On the one hand, we have to defend our culture and country against the tyranny of Western psychology that has done nothing but belittle our values and goals. On the other hand, we have to avoid celebrating just any indigenous trait as de facto liberating or nationalist. In particular, among women, let us accept that the ruling discourse in female psychology is oppressive, that this is imbedded in the social culture and in the hearts of many people. The discovery of a nationalistic, feminist and meaningful psychology is not equivalent to the discovery of indigenous consciousness and feelings only.

The objective to construct feminist values is a challenge for us to search for and use theories and philosophies of science that would aid us in our studies of our culture and in the methodologies of women fighting patriarchy. This is a challenge to academe to unite even more in the larger movement of transformation. After all it is from this movement that will arise the societal truth which we must study.