

# THE IDEOLOGY OF FEMALE DOMESTICITY: ITS IMPACT ON THE STATUS OF FILIPINO WOMEN

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Women of Southeast Asia have been known for their relatively high position in society. Ethnographic materials have regularly accounted for their active involvement in farming, trading, and management of family business as well as household affairs.<sup>1</sup> What have been often mentioned to account for this phenomenon are the predominance in the region of the bilateral kinship systems<sup>2</sup> and such cultural practices as equal inheritance rights between the sexes and patterns of postmarital residence that tend toward matrilocality.<sup>3</sup>

Anthropologists have also noted the presence of social structures that allow for strong female presence in the household and community. Geertz<sup>4</sup>, for instance, describes the organization of matrilocality in Javanese society where the woman exercises more authority, influence and responsibility, and receives greater affection and loyalty than her husband. Nash<sup>5</sup>, on the other hand, notes the

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<sup>1</sup> See J. de Young, *Village Life in Modern Thailand* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1955); B. Ward, ed., *Women in the New Asia: The Changing Role of Men and Women in South and Southeast Asia* (Paris: UNESCO, 1963); R. Burling, *Hill Farms and Paddy Fields* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1965) R. Winzeler, "Sexual Status in Southeast Asia: Comparative Perspectives on Women, Agriculture and Political Organization" in *Women of Southeast Asia* ed. P. Van Esterik (Detroit: Northern Illinois Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, G. Murdock, *Social Structure of Southeast Asia*, Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology No. 29.

<sup>3</sup> A. Hale, "The Search for a Rural Role: Women in Southeast Asia - The Northern Thai Cults in Perspective," *Mankind*, 14: 330 - 338.

<sup>4</sup> *The Javanese Family: A Study of Kinship and Socialization* (New York: Free Press, 1961).

<sup>5</sup> Manning Nash, *The Golden Road to Modernity: Village Life in Contemporary Burma* (New York: Wiley, 1965).

centrality of the mother/daughter role and the greater degree of coordination in kin ties among women in Burmese society.

The favorable position of Southeast Asian women has also been interpreted as a function of their significant contribution to household and rural economy.<sup>6</sup> Swidden cultivation and subsistence irrigated farming, two of the most common forms of production activities in the region, have been found to have significant female labor participation. Sanday<sup>7</sup> notes that in societies where female work accounts for less than 30 percent of subsistence, women have predictably low status. Meanwhile Quinn<sup>8</sup> and Winzeler suggest that women's status is high in societies where the sexual division of labor is fairly evenly balanced. "It can be said that the relatively high status and the independence widely characteristic of Southeast Asian women is linked to a farming pattern in which men and women are both involved, most often on equal and frequently on undifferentiated terms."<sup>9</sup>

Recent efforts by some scholars to qualify generalizations about the prominent role in society of Southeast Asian women have brought about some very interesting insights on this issue. For example, studies on the symbolic and ideological definitions of women as well as other cultural constructions, whether indigenous to the region or brought about by colonial and modern western influences, have shown a picture of female subordination and inferiority<sup>10</sup>. It is possible that the key to understanding the real condition of Southeast Asian women lies not only in the structures of marriage, kinship, inheritance, marital residence and female economic role, but also in their ideological position or worth. Moreover, there is a need to understand the extent to which gender ideologies influence the infrastructure of society.

Davis<sup>11</sup> observes that in Northern Thailand, there is an ideology of male dominance but a social structural dominance of fe-

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<sup>6</sup> A. Stoler, "Class Structure and Female Autonomy in Rural Java" in *Women and National Development: The Complexities of Change* ed. Wellesley Editorial Committee (Chicago: University Press, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> "Anthropological Studies on Women's Status," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 6:181-225.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Winzeler in Van Esterik, *Women of Southeast Asia*, p. 186.

<sup>10</sup> See Van Esterik, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Richard A. Davis, *Muang Methaphysics: A Study in Northern Thai Myth and Ritual* (Sidney: University of Sidney, 1974).

males. A similar claim has been made for the Philippines,<sup>12</sup> in view of its long experience under Western colonial rule. The intensification of the country's neocolonial relations with the United States after the Second World War likewise strengthened androcentric influences in the country,<sup>13</sup>

This paper describes some of the salient features of one of the more dominant gender ideologies in Philippine society today -- the ideology of female domesticity. It also discusses how this ideology has already influenced the lives of women, especially their domestic roles and participation in economic, political and other public activities. Ideology is used here as a kind of false consciousness which functions to legitimize the prevailing patterns of gender hierarchy and relations. Jeffries and Ransford<sup>14</sup> say that ideology works to make existing social inequalities acceptable to people and provide rationale that would make current state of affairs seem just or fair. Some degree of acceptance is necessary to maintain social stability and it is ideology that paves the way for such acceptance. Berger<sup>15</sup> also says that ideology functions in a manner that "it systematically distorts social reality in much the same way that an individual may neurotically deny, deform or reinterpret aspects of his life that are inconvenient to him." It serves as a smokescreen that obscures one's perception of reality.<sup>16</sup>

The Philippines was under Spanish American colonial rule for more than four hundred years. It was then that the patriarchal influences were introduced. Laws were passed that deprived women of their legal adulthood and made them dependents of their husband. The Catholic Church actively fostered the ideology of female domesticity through pulpit preachings and by limiting women's education to rudimentary reading and arithmetic, home crafts and Christ-

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<sup>12</sup> See F. L. Jocano, "Filipino Social Structure and Value System" in *Aspects of Filipino Kinship and Social Organization* ed. Jocano (Quezon City: Phil. Center for Advanced Studies, University of the Philippines, 1976).

<sup>13</sup> D. Aguilar, "Women in the Political Economy of the Philippines," *Alternatives*, 12: 511-522.

<sup>14</sup> V. Jeffries and E. Ransford, *Social Stratification: A Multiple Hierarchy Approach* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1980), p. 338.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Berger, "Sociology as a Form of Consciousness" in *Study of Society* ed. P. Rose (New York: Random House, 1965).

<sup>16</sup> M. Lowe and M.R. Hubbard, *Women's Nature: Rationalization of Inequity* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1983).

ian doctrine. Young women in those days were perceived as not needing further training since their "sphere of action was within the three German Ks, *kirche*, *küche* and *kinder* -- that is, church, kitchen and children,"<sup>17</sup>

Spanish education laid great emphasis on Castilian values and norms of sexual behavior. Girls were taught to be obedient and subservient to males particularly to the priests, colonial officials and to their father, husband and elder brothers. They were admonished to be "always demure in conduct, to value chastity and concentrate in developing skills that would make them excellent daughters, housewives, mothers and servants of God."<sup>18</sup>

American colonial rule did very little to eradicate patriarchal beliefs and practices. The school system maintained the same patterns of sexual division of work and even encouraged women to pursue careers, like teaching and nursing, which were compatible with their "womanly" qualities. The expansion of commercial agriculture and the export industry caused further deterioration of female status as thousands of women were drawn into these sectors as producers of cheap products for the U.S. and other Western markets. This is why even if certain traditional structures promotive of women's social standing managed to prevail throughout the colonial period and survived to the present, one finds many instances of gender inequality in Philippine society today.

### **Cultural Prescriptions for Female Domesticity**

Feminist scholars in the Philippines are one in recognizing the dominance of men in almost all areas of life except probably in the household where some expressions of gender parity in decision-making still prevails. Empirical studies conducted after the mid-seventies<sup>19</sup> began to challenge earlier generalizations about sexual equality after looking more closely at various aspects of gender relations and bringing in new parameters for assessing gender status. What stands out in these studies is their common evaluation of the pervasive influence of gender ideologies over patterns of sexual division of labor and the overall life condition and welfare of women.

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<sup>17</sup> Paz Mendoza-Guazon, *The Development and Progress of the Filipino Women* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 19228), p.19.

<sup>18</sup> Carol Sobritchea, "The Impact of American Colonial Education on Filipino Women" in *Asian Studies*, 27:9.

<sup>19</sup> See. C. Bautista, "Women in Marriage" in *Stereotype, Status and Satisfaction: The Filipina Among Filipinos*, (Quezon City: Department of Sociology, Univ. of the Philippines, 1977); Rojas-Aleta, et. al, *A Profile of Filipino Women* (Manila: Philippine Business for Social Progress).

The legitimization of male dominance in the household, in work, in politics and other areas of life is rooted in the cultural values, norms, religious beliefs, attitudes and life aspirations of Filipinos. A popular belief is that the sexes differ in their biological makeup and such differences account for the differing roles and positions in society. Filipino women are perceived to be physically weaker, shorter and smaller than men. As such, they are expected to do "light work" and engage in less "risky" occupations. What are commonly regarded as light work and, therefore, feminine work, largely consist of such domestic chores as cooking, laundering, ironing, dusting of furnitures, childcare and the like. The popular expression that a woman "is good only for the home" underscores the view that she is indeed biologically better suited for childcare and housekeeping. For reason of physical weakness, her rightful place is in the home where she can perform "lighter tasks" and be better protected from harm and danger by the male species.

In addition to legitimizing the prevailing division of domestic work, the belief in the natural weakness of women justifies their discrimination in occupations perceived as physically strenuous or dangerous. For instance, the dominance of male political leaders in the rural areas, from the provincial down to the community levels, has been explained as a practical response to the very demanding nature of the job. Such political offices are said to require frequent travels, long office hours, staying out late at night as well as interceding in serious political disputes. Similar reasons are given for male preference in a lot of rural occupations which, unfortunately for women, are the ones that command higher wages and salaries.

Cultural beliefs that regulate the physical mobility of females also find justification in women's physical weakness. Unlike their male counterparts, rural females, especially the young ones, do not roam freely within and outside their village. They are expected to stay in the house most of the time and limit their social activities to those held close to home. Beliefs about malevolent spirits, supra-humans and black magic serve as an effective mechanism of social and physical control.<sup>20</sup> Rural lore is rife with stories of how sorcerers or non-human creatures prey upon young and innocent girls who wander into the outskirts of the village or stay out late at night. As girls are taught early in life to value staying home, many grow up believing that such is the most natural thing to do, developing in the process an ambivalent attitude about active involvement in non-domestic activities.

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<sup>20</sup> R. Lieban, "Sorcery, Illness and Social Control in the Philippine Municipality" in *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 16: 127-143.

What are considered innate qualities of the sexes extend to their personality and behavioral characteristics. Filipino males are generally perceived to be brave, alert, decisive and highly responsible.<sup>21</sup> The females, in turn, are stereotyped as emotional, sensitive, indecisive and talkative. Housewives, in particular, are often described as quarrelsome, naggers and temperamental.<sup>22</sup> People say that although some of these traits may be acquired as one goes through life, most are inherent in a person's being male or female.

Philippine society nurtures other beliefs that tend to bind women to their traditional roles as housekeeper and childcarer. These include the belief in the primacy of the female reproductive role over her other roles, the perceived contradictions between family and public life and the need, especially of a woman, to put family interest above all her other concerns in life. Sevilla<sup>23</sup> notes:

When women themselves strongly believe that their place is at home, they become household-centered. The material and psychological needs of their husbands and families assume greater importance than their personal needs... Household needs, in fact, become defined as the wife's own needs. She tends to view the world solely in terms of home and family. Her own opportunities for advancement give way to her husband's or her children's personal development... While the husband forms and maintains friendships (usually male) outside the home, the wife is more likely to associate with her own relatives, i.e., parents and siblings, and friends (usually female) in that order. However, her family and husband remain the first preferences for sharing her time.

A dominant cultural value is to have several children of both sexes. This value underlies many of the people's life goals and aspirations such as good health, long life, happy marriage and

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<sup>21</sup> M. Pagaduan, *The Awakening of the Filipino Peasant Woman: A Participatory Research Among Women* (Quezon City: Forum for Rural Concerns Rural Women Committee, 1986).

<sup>22</sup> C. Conaco, et. al, "Personalities, Stereotypes and Attitudes" in *Stereotypes, Status and Satisfaction: The Filipina Among Filipinos* (Quezon City: Department of Sociology, University of the Philippines, 1977) and C. Sobritchea, "Gender Ideology and the Status of Women in Philippine Rural Society" in *Essays on Women* ed. Sr. M. J. Manzanar, OSB (Manila: The Institute of Women's Studies, 1987).

<sup>23</sup> "The Filipino Woman and the Family" in *The Filipina Woman in Focus* ed. A. Torres (Bangkok : UNESCO).

material prosperity. Because of the importance that Philippine society gives to family and childcare, practically the entire life of most married women is spent in preparing to be, and in performing the role of, wife, mother and housekeeper. To some, fulfilling these roles would require foregoing advanced schooling or pursuing a professional career.

Children are believed central to marriage; their presence in the family is thought necessary to keep it intact. They are believed to be "graces from God" sent to give their parents a happy and prosperous life by helping in household chores, earning a living and assisting them in their old age. Consequently, childlessness is considered a lonely and undesirable state<sup>24</sup> and can potentially cause the breakup of marriage or infidelity by the male spouse. A lot of people, especially in the rural areas, still believe that a husband is justified in "fooling around" or in having a child with another woman if his wife cannot give him one. Unfortunately, a woman must not do the same. Society expects her to be always faithful and loyal to her mate even if he is the one unable to bear a child.

The socialization of females puts great emphasis on the formation of values and behavioral traits that make for a good wife, mother and housekeeper. An ideal married woman is someone who is willing to forego her personal development for the sake of her children and spouse. She is kind, hardworking, loving and supportive of the career of her husband.<sup>25</sup> Adul de Leon<sup>26</sup> notes that the kind of socio-cultural conditioning of Filipino women leads them to "self-flagellate" or take the blame on themselves whenever do not work the way they should. She adds:

They too are victims because this conditioning makes them appear as criminals as when we hear people remark (about) a battered wife, "kasi nagger siya" (it is because she is a nagger), to a rape victim, "kasi ang seksi niyang magdamit" (it is because of the sexy way she dresses) or to a prostitute... "kasi tamad siya" (it is because she is lazy).

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<sup>24</sup> J.C. Sevilla, *Research on the Filipino Family: Review and Prospects* (Manila: Development Academy of the Philippines), p.32.

<sup>25</sup> F.L. Jocano, op.cit.

<sup>26</sup> "A Perspective for Women's Work on Issues of Violence Against Women in the Proceedings of the 4th National Congress on GABRIELA (Manila: GABRIELA, 1987).

The traditional sexual division of labor is also reinforced by the popular belief that there exist some contradictions between family and public life. This belief purports that family interests and welfare are undermined whenever a married woman spends a lot of time in non-domestic activities. The ideal is for her to devote most of her time looking after the needs of her spouse and children while the husband serves as the primary breadwinner. When faced with a need to make a choice between family and career, a working wife is expected to give priority to the former.

Despite overwhelming evidence that the income brought home by working mothers has substantially improved the quality of family living, Filipinos, by and large, do not look favorably at working mothers. "The primacy of financial considerations... makes one suspect that if it were not necessary and if one had a choice, the preference or ideal situation is to have the wife stay at home."<sup>27</sup>

### **Women's Status in the Context of Cultural Sexism**

Filipino women constitute nearly half of the country's total population, estimated at 55 million in 1985. About 60 percent reside in the countryside while the rest are located in urban areas. Females of working age, 16 years and older, constitute the majority (59.9 percent) although the size of the dependent age groups is equally large for a country going through economic recovery and where about 70 percent of the total households still live below the poverty line. Population growth has not gone below two percent since the Second World War, putting the Philippines among the fastest growing countries in the world today.

The status and roles of women in the city and rural areas as well as across ethno-linguistic groups are similar in many respects although some variations occur in regard to employment patterns, educational profile, and other social indicators. The traditional pattern of task allocation in the household remains popular throughout the country. The women do the bulk of household chores and assume primary responsibility over childcare, while the men serve as primary breadwinner. A slight departure from this pattern comes when women are gainfully employed although they usually pass on the responsibility to a female relative, daughter or domestic helper.

Although more than half of all women of working age are classified as "fulltime housekeepers," the number of those who have entered the labor force as part of the formal as well as informal

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<sup>27</sup> G. Castillo, *Beyond Manila: Philippine Rural Problems in Perspective* (Ottawa: International Development Center, 1980), p. 146.



economy has increased substantially during the past decades. From 1974 to 1983, female labor force participation increased by about 8.6 percent.<sup>28</sup> A similar pattern has been observed as regards women's involvement in the informal sector. One of the reasons often cited to explain the increase in female labor participation is the deterioration of the economy and corresponding decrease of household incomes during the 21 years of Marcos rule. Many housewives sought gainful employment to augment family earnings. The following figures show the extent of women's involvement in various types of work in 1983.<sup>29</sup>

Type of Worker	Total (in thousands)	% Women
Employer	808	16.1
Self-Employed	6,632	32.4
Wage and Salary worker	7,864	36.8
Private	6,126	34.7
Government	1,655	44.7
Own Family Enterprises	83	36.1
Unpaid family worker	3,909	54.0
All workers	19,212	37.9

Employed women dominate the sales, service and professional/technical sectors. They are least represented in the production and administrative as well as managerial sectors, as shown in the following percentage breakdown of female labor across occupational groups in 1983.<sup>30</sup>

Sales Workers	66.1
Professional, Technical and Related Workers	62.7
Service Workers	60.1
Clerical Workers	50.3
Farm Workers	29.8

<sup>28</sup> National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, *Women Workers in the Philippines* (Manila: NCRFW, 1985), p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, *Women Workers in the Philippines* (Manila: NCRFW, 1985).

<sup>30</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *The Women's Decade in the Philippines: Analysis of Significant Changes in Women's Role and Status* (Manila: NCRFW, 1985).

Administrative and Managerial Workers	25.0
Production and Related Workers	23.1

The majority of economically active women in the rural areas participate in farming and related activities while those in the urban centers are predominantly found in the service, sales and production sectors. Female involvement in agriculture generally comes in the form of unpaid family and hired labor. The first includes assistance provided by a farmer's wife and daughter in food preparation for hired workers, seedbed preparation, or purchase of farm equipment and supplies. It also includes the production of household needs that would otherwise have to be bought in the market.<sup>31</sup> Female contributions to farm hired labor include planting/transplanting and replanting (49 percent), harvesting (48 percent), piling (46 percent) and threshing (44 percent). Outside of crop farming, rural women are active in backyard cultivation of vegetables for home and market, raising poultry or livestock, operation of small retail stores, street vending of family produce, or domestic service for rich households in nearby towns or cities. Depending on the dominant industry in the community, rural women also engage in weaving of mats and hats, pottery making or production of local delicacies. Since these occupations are often done intermittently and on a part-time basis, they often escape official monitoring.

Despite the growth of female labor force participation, there has not been a commensurate decrease in their childcare and household responsibilities. This has caused a serious problem of double burden, especially for rural women who are not financially able to hire domestic help or buy labor-saving household appliances. As mentioned earlier, the men are perceived to be the primary breadwinners. They "do not feel that they have home-management responsibilities even when they occasionally perform household chores."<sup>32</sup> A nationwide study conducted more than a decade ago showed that the husband had a very minimal contribution to household chores.<sup>33</sup> Only 16 percent of them reported doing the

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<sup>31</sup> C. Sobritchea, "Rural Womens in the Philippines: Some Notes on their Status and Problems" in *Philippine Culture and Society: Inter-Ethnic Relations (A Sourcebook)* (Quezon City: Department of Antropology, Univ. of the Phil., 1984), p. 65.

<sup>32</sup>J. C: Sevilla in A. Torres, *op. cit.* p. 38.

<sup>33</sup>C. Bautista *op. cit.*

cooking; 38 percent, the washing; 29 percent, the house cleaning; 22 percent, the clothes washing; and 21 percent, childcare. This pattern has hardly changed across the years as indicated in more recent studies of rural families.<sup>34</sup> On the whole, female time allocation for household chores and childcare ranges from 8 to 12 hours a day with urban women spending less time than their rural counterparts.<sup>35</sup>

The responsibility over household and child care has likewise constrained the employment options of women. Many have to contend with work that will not take them away from the home much of the time. The National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women<sup>36</sup> notes:

For many of the women in the informal sector, working is a matter of survival. It is remarkable to see these women create their own income strategies to alleviate poverty. They for example enter into subsistence production that require skills closely relating to the domestic sphere, such as those which allow a combination of work and childcare; forms that are extensions of women's domestic responsibilities; forms that require little capital outlay and do not threaten the traditional boundaries of sex-stereotyping of roles.

Among the gainfully employed women less than half (43 percent) were reported as fully employed.<sup>37</sup> This gives a very high percentage of underemployment or underutilization of female labor. The situation is worse in the rural areas where only 34.3 percent of all female workers were fully employed.<sup>38</sup> Among the underemployed, however, only 26 percent accounted for additional work. Clearly, a lot of women are voluntarily underemployed and do not like to be fully occupied by their economic pursuits. The popular perception that their economic contribution is only supplementary to the income of their husbands is what can probably account for this situation. At the same time, the women themselves regulate their in-

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<sup>34</sup> M. Pagaduan, *op. cit.*

<sup>35</sup> C. Bautista, *op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> National Commission on The Role of Filipino Women, *Women Workers*, p.31.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

come-earning activities so as not to jeopardize their family responsibilities. This occurs even among those who are highly educated and who have the potential to contribute more to national development efforts.

Women employed outside the formal economy are mostly self-employed as street hawkers or operators of small retail stores and engaged in contractual services that allow for variable working hours. Others are contracted to manufacture or process parts of a particular product in their homes or in makeshift work areas within their village. Women in these occupations do not enjoy the work privileges and benefits that their counterparts in the formal sector normally get. They are outside the reach of labor legislation and government welfare programs, making them highly vulnerable to low wages, deplorable working conditions and other onerous labor practices.

**Female Income Status.** A fairly good indication of women's low status in Philippine society is the amount of income they get relative to men's income. Government figures show that men receive higher average real earnings than women. Taking all occupational sectors, female workers get only 35 percent of the total annual income of all Filipino workers.<sup>39</sup> There is greater disparity in agriculture where female workers get an average weekly income which is less than a third of male farm workers. In a lot of cases, the actual value of female labor is unaccounted for inasmuch as it forms part of unpaid family labor. Females comprise more than one half of the total unpaid family workers. Their sector increased by 24 percent from 1978 to 1983.<sup>40</sup>

One of the reasons for the overall uneven share of earnings between the sexes is the concentration of women in the service and sales industries as well as in the informal sector where wages and salaries are generally low. Occupations that earn well and are considered prestigious are still heavily dominated by men. This goes for top-level supervisory or management positions in both the private and public sectors and such professions as law, engineering, architecture and actuarial science. Only recently have women gone into what were once male-dominated fields like banking and finance, accounting, and those just mentioned.<sup>41</sup> The earnings of female ex-

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<sup>39</sup>NCRFW, *Women Workers*, p. 19.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>41</sup>National Economic Development Authority, *Philippine Statistical Yearbook*, 1985.

ecutives/managers comprise only one percent of the total female wage and salary.<sup>42</sup>

For occupations where both sexes participate equally, the disparity in their overall earnings may be attributed to the popular perception that female income is simply supplementary to male earning and that female workers are often less productive because of physical limitations and the constraints posed by their reproductive and housekeeping roles. In fact, women's organizations in the country have, time and again, raised the issues of unfair wages and discriminatory practices as regards recruitment, promotion and tenure.

#### **Educational Profile.**

Filipinos place a high value on education. Earning a college degree is seen as the best means to move up the social ladder and achieve material prosperity. As such, a sizeable amount of household income is allocated to the education of children. The literacy rate of the country has consistently been one of the highest in Southeast Asia since the turn of the present century. In the early eighties, it has reached above 80 percent with the male rate just a little higher. The proportion of females on the lower school levels varies from slightly lower than, to equal to, the number of male students. What is most interesting is the overall better representation of females in the tertiary levels except in traditionally male-dominated courses such as law, maritime education, engineering and technology. Women constitute 54 percent of all college students, 64 percent of all graduate students and 65 percent of all post-graduate students.<sup>43</sup>

While the aforementioned observations clearly show a pattern of gender parity in education and in fact, seem to augur well for the improvement of the female condition, they do not explain why female educational development does not directly translate to better employment opportunities and conditions as well as higher female labor force participation. What has been happening, in fact, is that many female college graduates do not enter the labor force, or are absent from it for intermittent periods because of conflict with house-keeping and childcare roles. To some extent, it can be argued that the potential of educated women is not being fully realized in view of pervasive cultural prescriptions for them to be conventional and ordinary.

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<sup>42</sup>NCRFW, *Women Workers*, p. 20.

<sup>43</sup>NCRFW, *Women's Decade in the Philippines*, p. 30.

The preponderance of females on the graduate and post-graduate levels is indicative of their desire to improve their income and working status, inasmuch as the pursuit of an advanced degree is a common requirement for salary and rank promotion in many offices especially in the government bureaucracy and school system. Higher education is being used to improve the women's chance of breaking the dominance of males over top-level positions. As it presently stands, however, it is still an uphill battle for them. In 1984, for example, only seven out of a total of 74 state colleges and universities were headed by women. Men dominated such school leadership positions as Regional Director ( 77 percent), Assistant Regional Director (73 per cent) and Superintendent (69 percent).

### **Women in Politics and Other Public Affairs.**

The ideology of domesticity has its most telling impact on women's participation in politics and similar public affairs. It is in these areas where they are least represented and where serious obstacles for greater involvement abound. On the whole, the female share of political offices, from the village to the national levels has hardly changed during the past decades. It has remained very minimal and shrouded by the mystifying effect of the presence of a few women leaders in the highest offices of government including the position of President of the Republic. The percentage share of local positions by women leaders in the early eighties is as follows:<sup>44</sup>

Provincial	
Governor	6.8
Vice-Governor	8.2
Board Member	6.3
Municipality/City	
Mayor	4.7
Vice -Mayor	5.4
Council Member	8.4
Barangay (Village)	
Captain	6.3
Council member	11.7
Secretary	18.3
Treasurer	22.2

Sex-stereotyping of some political positions is evident in the higher representation of women as village secretary and treasurer as these offices are believed to be compatible with traditional female

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

roles. More recently, it has become popular to field at least one female candidate in every slate since such strategy has been effective in getting the female votes. At the same time, the presence of a few female leaders on all levels of government is generally welcomed since it projects the image of widespread sexual parity and equal representation in political decision-making affairs. The bottom line, of course, is that female influence on political affairs is very limited inasmuch as they often take charge of the nutrition, medical, home economics and other welfare projects of government. Decision-making and actual involvement in areas and projects that affect the fate of the entire province or village such as the construction of infrastructure facilities or introduction of industries are often left to male political leaders.<sup>45</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the low count of women in politics stems from the popular belief that it is still largely "men's territory" and often incompatible with women's roles as housewife and mother. Additionally, the deterioration of peace and order in the countryside caused by widespread insurgency and militarization seems to have heightened women's ambivalent attitude towards running for public office.<sup>46</sup>

The female presence in appointive government offices fares better than her involvement in politics. She is better felt and perhaps, appreciated as career service officer and public servant in the diplomatic service and judiciary. However, women's participation in this sector is also heavily influenced by prevailing cultural values as shown in the following figures:<sup>47</sup> [(NCRFW, 1985b: 77-79)]:

Career Executive Service in Government Ministries	%Women
Agriculture and Food	16
Natural Resources	6
Public Works and Highways	4
National Defense	0
Education and Culture	29
Health	26

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<sup>45</sup> Rojas-Aleta, *Profile of Filipino Women* and C. Sobritchea in Mananzan, *op. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> C. Sobritchea in *Philippine Culture and Society* and in Mananzan.

<sup>47</sup> NCRFW, *Women's Decade...*, pp.77-79.

Labor and Employment	33
Social Services and Development	84
Diplomatic Service	28
Judiciary	6

## **Concluding Remarks**

The foregoing discussion underscores the effect of the ideology of female domesticity on the sexual division of work both in the domestic and non-domestic spheres. The paper argues that such ideology has worked, in many ways, to legitimize gender stratification at work, in politics and other areas of life. Popular perceptions and beliefs about a female and the roles she does best have fostered conditions discriminatory to her social position and welfare.

These observations depart from the commonly noted persistence of sexual egalitarianism in many parts of Southeast Asia. The author does not deny the fact, however, that the Filipino women have maintained their strong influence in certain decision-making areas and enjoyed gender parity but only in limited areas of domestic and public involvement. What seems to be the pattern therefore is the presence of competing forces, with their corresponding ideological prop, that operate to bring up or pull down the status of women. There are areas where female autonomy and power remain strong in areas where they are increasingly being marginalized and oppressed. The role of history, ethnic and class differences and the impact of external factors all account for these contending forces that impinge on women's lives.

What seems to be a useful approach for studying women's status is to view gender ideology as part of the larger superstructure that maintains a particular social formation. Such approach provides a wholistic framework that can bring together what may seem to be contradictory phenomena or disjointed images of women's condition. It also prevents us from viewing women's status as static and impervious to historical changes. Women's changing condition must therefore be viewed within the context of the overall dialectical developments in society, particularly the articulation between the ideological domain of culture and the infrastructure that it maintains.