

A REFLECTION ON SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Virginia A. Miralao

Let me start with a personal word of thanks to Profs. Gelia Castillo and Mercedes Concepcion who were my mentors some 40 years ago. I owe much of my early training in sociology and foundations in the social sciences to them and to my other professors at the University of the Philippines, including Profs. Ofelia Angangco, Fe Arcinas, Belen Medina, Ricardo Zarco and Ruben Santos-Cuguyan of the Department of Sociology; Profs. Felipe-Landa Jocano, Mario Zamora and Moises Bello of the Department of Anthropology; and Profs. Alfredo Lagmay and F.G. David of the Psychology Department.

I trained under them in the 1960s, a time characterized by steady and reasonably rapid rates of economic growth worldwide, and for the Philippines in particular, a relatively upbeat period – signaling the country's fuller recovery from WWII and pointing to bright prospects for national development. Although the 1960s had its own share of economic and political turmoils, it was against a generally optimistic outlook of continuing economic and social progress that I was schooled in the dominant "positivist" orientation of the social sciences at that time – an orientation that placed a premium on the scientific method for advancing knowledge and on the instrumentalist use of scientific knowledge to foster economic growth and promote human welfare.

I got the impression from our conference organizers that for my presentation today, I should perhaps say something about the conference theme, *"Transformations of Social Institutions: Disjunctures, Confluences and Continuities,"* even as I also speak of my own training and work and practice as a sociologist. To help organize my presentation, I borrow from a

broad observation made by Sociologist Neil Smelser towards the close of the millennium articulating his views on the “vast social transformations” occurring in our own contemporary times. Smelser’s view is that vast transformations “. . .develop out of nations’ individual and collective, relatively short-term reactions to their economic and political environments, without very much consideration of their long-term consequences. The longer-term transformations—even revolutions—are most often the unanticipated accumulation of the precipitates of these shorter-term reactions.”¹ In brief, the grand/big changes that we seem to experience over time do not happen in “fits and spurts” but are the result of the “hum drum” – the everyday adaptations that numerous social actors including ordinary individuals and collectivities as families, households and communities, and state and non-state authorities make to their immediate circumstances.

I find Smelser’s view useful in pulling together my own thoughts on the Transformations of Social Institutions based on some of the research that I have done over the last several decades on women’s roles, families and households. Following Smelser’s broad view on social change, I use the researches I have been involved in to illustrate multilevel processes of shifting, adaptations and changes that I have observed in 1) the theoretical perspectives and methodologies that guided my researches on basically the same field or topic over the decades; 2) the social roles of women and men and other institutional practices within families and households as shown by research results; and 3) my own views and reflections on institutions and social transformations and on my journey as a sociologist and more broadly as a social scientist.

So in succession, let me turn to those researches that I have done. Moving to Ateneo de Manila University in 1971, one of my first assignments at the University’s Institute of Philippine Culture (IPC) was to oversee a nationwide FP-KAP (family planning-knowledge, attitudes and practices) survey aimed at assessing the role of social workers from the Department of Social Welfare as communicators and motivators for family planning practice.² The research was driven then by the worldwide attention on the rapid population growth of developing countries and which occupied the energies of governments, policymakers and academe. (In 1970, the Philippines was all of 38 million people and growing unsustainably at 3.2 percent per annum). The IPC study I was directing was just one of several FP-KAP surveys of the period, and the findings of which were expected to guide the state in crafting a national population policy and program.

Though the issue was one of population and development, the policy-making part was (then as now) expectedly political. Interestingly however, the greatest opposition to a population control policy in the 1970s did not come from the Bishops and the Catholic Church as we are witnessing today,³ but from left-wing groups which denounced such programs as Western impositions, and pointed to President Marcos' expressed preference for population control to illustrate how much he was a stooge of Western imperialism. But I may have been too absorbed with learning survey methodologies hands on from another eminent mentor, Fr. Frank Lynch, SJ, to be bothered too much with the political and ideological debates on population control. It was a source of satisfaction to me to realize that indeed our survey data yielded results that conformed with expectations suggested by theory: i.e., that women's FP-KAP varied systematically by rural-urban residence, age, education, social class and other determinants. Here I should mention that the theoretical frame of FP-KAP studies drew from demographic transition theory which broadly states that economic progress triggers many other changes that lower death rates initially and birth rates eventually, allowing countries to transition to a new demographic regime and to stabilize their populations at lower levels of death and birth rates. Outside of women's childbearing and -rearing roles and functions, little was said about women's statuses vis-à-vis men's, and much less of patriarchal systems of subordination and control. The interest of our research then was simply and straightforwardly to determine women's desire for family planning and how this might be met by a population control program. And perhaps reflecting the improved economic conditions of Filipino families in the immediate post-war period through the 1960s, FP-KAP studies did show considerable numbers of Filipino women wanting to control their births and to practice family planning. The adoption thus of a national population program in 1970 was soon followed by a precipitous drop in average family sizes from 6 children in the 1960s to 5 children in the 1970s, and a commensurate decline in our population growth rate from over 3 percent per annum to 2.7 percent per annum.

My next related work was my dissertation research and here I divert a little to say that my earlier FP-KAP study actually helped in my admission to the Sociology Department of Cornell University where a senior faculty and social-demographer-specialist of Latin America took me as his advisee. In line with the evolving concerns of the day and the research demands of public policymaking, my adviser, Professor J. Mayone Stycos suggested that I focus my dissertation on the impact of changing women's roles on their

fertility. The International Women's Decade had just been declared in 1975 and a growing feminist consciousness was encouraging research on women by women. And so I returned to Manila in 1977 to begin work on Women's Employment and Fertility⁴ using the data set from the Philippine component of the multi-country Value of Children Surveys undertaken in the Philippines by the Philippine Social Science Council (PSSC) under the direction of a former classmate, Randy Bulatao.

The points I wish to make on my dissertation research are that first on the theorizing side, this was now guided by a theoretical formulation less grand than the modernization/demographic transition theory. This intermediate frame was the "new household economics" first developed by Howard Becker in the 1960s and which was increasingly being applied to test formulations and hypotheses on household decision-making. Briefly, the "new household economics" views households as not too different from firms and postulates that households/families operate to maximize their common welfare. This assumption underpins much of household decision-making, be this in the area of household expenditures and investments, or the deployment of family labor, or the number of children that couples will have. In my dissertation, I used the new home economics to draw attention to the so called "opportunity costs of women's employment" so that the higher the foregone incomes of women from employment, the more likely too, a couple would limit their births to allow wives to engage in paid work outside of the home. While earlier paradigms on women's births or fertility took the traditional gender division of labor in the home as a given, the new home economics sought to capture changing household adaptations and women's realities: that women are not just bound to childbearing and homemaking roles but that in many cases in fact, couples/families opt to have fewer children so wives can work. In contrast with the earlier FP-KAP frames which were simply interested in knowing women's own desires for children, the evolving paradigms implied that wives/women could negotiate their wishes in household decision-making. Hence, there are not just women's perspectives on family planning, but men's perspectives too, and couples' as well.

Suffice it to say, that being a positivist formulation, the new home economics was methodologically translatable to empirical, quantifiable testing. The methodology of my dissertation research was quite quantitative therefore, following multiple regression models. This made me appreciate why social planners and policymakers are more inclined to listen to economists than other social scientists. Through quantification, economists

are better able to point to factors that are manipulable in certain ways to bring about desired outcomes, e.g., as the importance of not just raising women's education, but raising this beyond Grade 5 in order to have a dampening effect on fertility desires.

If the paradigm used in my dissertation highlighted the significance of women's direct contributions to household income/welfare through their involvement in paid employment, a subsequent research I did in 1980-81 meant to surface the invisibility of women's crucial contributions through their homework and child care activities. By this time, the women's movement had advanced to a new level of consciousness raising on the subjugation of women and the undervaluation of their work and worth. The challenge this posed to research then was how to empirically demonstrate this subjugation/undervaluation and by extension, women's marginalization in development processes and outcomes. Under NEDA's Women in Development (WID) umbrella program, we at IPC pioneered in the conduct of time-use studies to determine how much time and effort do female and male family members exert on paid work, housework, childcare, other necessary community activities and rest and leisure.⁵ With data from surveys done in selected Manila and provincial communities, our time-use study results dramatically portrayed women's double burdens and unfair treatment in patriarchal structures. I must add that raising my own two boys at that time, I felt that our study results were describing not only the multiple burdens of other women but also my own.

Our time-use study results were used extensively by women's groups to explain and advance their causes; and by statistical agencies like the National Statistical Coordination Board to press for the periodic collection of time-use data for the valuation of women's unpaid work in national accounts. Though this did not happen (owing to difficulties in arriving at an acceptable formula for housework valuation), the partnership between/among government agencies, women's groups and researchers did much to unpack earlier conceptualizations of women's roles and promote more egalitarian constructions of gender roles and relationships. Towards the end of the International Women's Decade in 1985, the Philippines had attained much in terms of gender equity. Even the women's groups of left-leaning organizations had dropped their resistance to population control programs, realizing that child limitation or birth control is essential to women's emancipation.

Then in 1990-91, I accepted an 18-months' assignment from the International Labour Organization to go to the Maldives and help in the gender-disaggregation of data collected from the Maldives' first modern-day census of 1985; and direct the country's (also first) national survey on women.⁶ Coming from the Philippines where much progress had been made towards gender equity, the situation of Maldivian women in 1990 was like a throwback to ages long past. Owing to its unique geography, culture and history, the Maldives remained isolated and insulated from new trends occurring elsewhere in the globe. Though registering robust annual GNP growth rates, economic development was contained for the most part within the islands' fishing and tourism industries. The fishing export trade was expectedly in the hands of men; while the Maldives' Islamic Code prevented contact between the local population and particularly its women on the one hand, and its island tourist resorts, on the other. Schools were just being established and employment opportunities for women were few, limited only to office jobs in government and some in the private sector. As a result of these and the unique blending of Islamic teachings and an island culture, statistics revealed that Maldivian girl-brides on average, marry before their 15th birthday and by the time they are 52, they would on average, have married and divorced three times and borne five to six children.

To outsiders and the UN and other development agencies, the statistics were shocking and so almost all development aid to the islands were tied to Gender and Development (or GAD) programs. The Ministries of Planning and Women's Affairs were mobilized to do gender-sensitivity training, skills training, livelihood and literacy programs etc. to delay marriages and do away with girl-brides, reduce the incidence of divorce, and bring down women's (and the country's) birth rates.

Though I conducted the surveys and did the tasks expected of me, my own visits to the atolls convinced me that the conditions for changing women's status were not there. Outside the Maldives' capital island of Malé, the schools in the atolls did not go beyond Grade 5 and employment for women were virtually non-existent. When women and men have little to do but sit on sandy beaches under coconut trees and watch the blue sea and sky, and catch a few fish maybe and gather some chillies, it is almost an impossible task to persuade young girls and boys not to get married and not to have children. More feminist researchers and women activists would have been most frustrated by the situation of Maldivian women, but (as Smelser suggests),

I knew that not much change could be expected of the Maldives' marriage and family patterns given that no changes have occurred in women's daily lives. I returned from the islands sobered by the experience and the knowledge that one cannot really force social change to happen. It also dawned on me that social researchers are sometimes called upon to overcome given paradigms and discourses that have become too caught up with their own social advocacies or ideologies, if they are to remain faithful to the task of analyzing existing realities.

I turn now to the last set of work I have been doing since the mid 1990s, after returning from the Maldives. With the declaration of 1994 as the International Year of the Family, I enjoined colleagues to contribute research articles to the *Philippine Sociological Review's* (PSR) special issue on the Filipino family.⁷ Using data from the Family Income and Expenditure Surveys, I also began work on the income and expenditure patterns of female- and male-headed households for a special gender issue of the 1997 Philippine Human Development Report.⁸ In addition, I wrote a paper on the "Family, Traditional Values and the Sociocultural Transformation of Philippine Society"⁹ for a convention on Globalism, Regionalism and Nationalism at Seiki University in 1996; and helped direct studies/surveys on the Filipino youth in 2003.¹⁰ From these, I wish to draw attention to some of the transformations of the Filipino family since 1971, or over the period that I have done research relating to the topic.

As an institution, a first major change in the Filipino family is in its size which as noted earlier, began to decline in the 1970s. The Filipino youth in our 2003 surveys typically have between three to four siblings while their parents had between five to six, indicating that today's families are having some two children less than their immediate parental generation. This reduction in family size represents quite an accomplishment considering that 30 to 40 years is but a short span in historical time.

A second major change in the Filipino family has to do with gender roles. The traditional gender division of labor in the home is now a fading memory to the present generation of Filipino youth who are growing up in families/households where both parents are relatively well educated and employed. For a growing number of Filipino youth in fact, parents are not just working outside of the home; one or both are working abroad. Gone are the notions that it is fathers who bring home the bacon and mothers who stay at home and take care of children.

Third, still relating to gender roles, if we saw a reconstruction of women's roles from traditional to something more libertarian in the last few decades, I think we are witnessing in the current period also a new construction of fatherhood to suit the changing realities of men. Time-use studies today reveal a greater involvement of men in housework and childcare particularly when their wives are also working like themselves. As a result, not a few men are now also experiencing double burdens (including my son who is now raising two daughters with his wife). There may be a move towards what psychologist Allen Tan termed as the "generative-father type" in his 1994 article in the PSR.¹¹ He says that a generative father spends much time with his children and enjoys being with them such that fatherhood becomes an opportunity for his own growth and fulfillment. An expression of this emerging trend may be seen in the appearance of regular column in *The Philippine Star* titled "Kindergarten Dad" where the columnist writes about the travails and joys of fatherhood and family life.¹² A newspaper column like this would have been unthinkable and could not have appeared in the 1970s.

Fourth, research also points to other changes in the form and structure of the family as a social institution. The more obvious of these are the increasing cases of marital separations and family dysfunctions which have given rise to alternative family forms other than the traditional nuclear family (as for example, single-parent families). Like the other changes mentioned earlier—declining family size and changing gender roles— these changes in family structure and form reflect adaptations to modernization/liberalization and today's global changes.

Fifth, despite modernization and globalization however, research also suggests that family ties remain very strong among Filipinos. In her work on the Filipino family, Prof. Medina explains that in our country, there are more extended families in cities than the countryside precisely because urban families absorb their poorer rural relatives when they come to work in the city.¹³ Because of family support, single parent- and female-headed households too, reside in extended households and so do the families of our overseas contract workers. Enduring family ties are also seen in the importance accorded the Filipino elderly by children and kin, making our elderly among the happiest and most content in the Asia Pacific Region.¹⁴

Sixth, in the not too distant future, our 2003 youth surveys point to decreasing marriage rates further delays in the age of marriage and continuing declines in the birth rate in the country. A substantial thirty percent of today's

youth are not sure they want to get married in the future; and those who do, foresee marrying only when they are around 30 years old and having only 2 to 3 children at the most.

Seventh and finally, we can infer from existing work that the Filipino family will continue to change in form, size and structure but that, as a social institution, it too, will endure. Like their forbears before them, the substantial majority of today's Filipino youth see themselves as transitioning successfully to adulthood – hoping to finish school and having their own jobs when they are 25 years old, and marrying and raising their own families some five or so years down the road.¹⁵ Hence, if my grandmother were alive and were to meet my granddaughter today, both would know they come from vastly different times, but I think my grandmother would recognize that the social form my granddaughter lives in is still like a family.

NOTES

- 1 Keynote Address on Social Transformations delivered by Neil J. Smelser at the Second Session of the Intergovernmental Council of the Management of Social Transformations Programme (MOST), UNESCO, Paris, 3-7 July 1995.
- 2 The findings of this study are in Miralao, Virginia A., "Evaluation of the Family Planning Services of the Department of Social Welfare. Final Report." Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City, 1973.
- 3 Some 38 years after the adoption of natural population program by President Marcos in 1970, a new Reproductive Health Bill which seeks to grant Filipino women/couples improved access to birth control methods is being debated on in Congress. The Catholic Church has come out strongly to oppose this bill.
- 4 My unpublished dissertation was titled "Female Employment and Fertility in the Philippines." Cornell University. Ithaca, New York, 1981.
- 5 Among the author's publications on time-use studies are "Women and Men in Development: Findings from a Pilot Survey," Final Report, Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City, 1980; "Time-Use as a Measure of Women's Role in Development," In Papers and Proceedings of the 2nd National Convention on Statistics. The Statistical Advisory Board and the Statistical Coordination Office, NEDA, 1980; and "Methodological Issues in the Collection and Analysis of

- Women's Time-Use Data," Occasional Paper #3. Women's Programme, Asian and Pacific Development Centre, Kuala Lumpur, 1983.
- 6 My work on the Maldives may be seen in "Women's Status and Development Trends in the Maldives: A survey report submitted to the Department of Women's Affairs and UNDP Malé, and to the Labour and Population Team for Asia and the Pacific, ILO, Bangkok, 1991; and (with Khadeeja Ibrahim) "Women's Status in the Maldives." Report prepared for the Department of Women's Affairs and UNDP Malé, 1991.
 - 7 See Vol. 42, Nos. 1-4 *Philippine Sociological Review*, 1994.
 - 8 See Chapter 5, "Household Expenditure Patterns Among Male- and Female-Headed Households" In *1997 Philippine Human Development Report*, Human Development Network and UNDP Manila. 1997.
 - 9 My paper of the same title also appears in Vol 45, Nos. 1-4 of the *Philippine Sociological Review*, 1997.
 - 10 These studies on the Filipino Youth were undertaken for the 5th National Social Science Congress with the theme "What 's with the Filipino Youth: Perspectives from the Social Sciences" and organized by the Philippine Social Science Council on 15-17 May 2003. The specific growth survey reports include *Filipino Youth in Transition: A Survey of Urban High School Senior Students* edited by Josefina Natividad and *Filipino Youth in Special High Schools* by Virginia A. Miralao. Both were published by the Philippine Social Science Council and the UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines in 2004.
 - 11 Allen Tan, "Four Learnings of Fatherhood," in *Philippine Sociological Review* Vol. 42, Nos. 1-4, 1994.
 - 12 "Kindergarten Dad" by Tony Montemayor, is a regular column appearing every Thursday in *The Philippine Star*.
 - 13 See Belen T.G. Medina and Eliseo A. de Guzman "Filipino Families and Households in Three Selected Philippine Areas," in *Philippine Sociological Review* Vol 42, Nos. 1-4, 1994; and also Prof. Medina's own reader/text on The Filipino Family, University of the Philippines Press: Quezon City, 1991.
 - 14 See Michael A. Costello "The Elderly in Filipino Households: Current Status and Future Prospects," in *Philippine Sociological Review* Vol 42, Nos. 1-4, 1994.
 - 15 See the earlier cited 2003 Filipino youth surveys of Josefina Natividad and Virginia A. Miralao, Philippine Social Science Council and UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines.