

LOWLAND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION I: LOCAL KIN GROUPS IN A CENTRAL LUZON BARRIO

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Among the Northern Tagalog as found in San Isidro, Nueva Ecija, there are corporate local kin groups composed of family-households. There is no Tagalog term for such groups, but residents recognize their existence. Further, there are terms for the three relationships which, in combination, are associated with common membership in a local kin group: magkapitbahay ('neighbors'), magkamag-anak ('kinsmen'), and magkasambahay ('individuals who feel at home in one another's homes'; literally, 'housemates'). Local kin groups are the suprafamilial units within which all important day-to-day, face-to-face interaction occurs. Moreover, since the children born to family-households belonging to such a local kin group tend at marriage to remain in the group, the local kin group persists over time. In this it is somewhat like a unilineal group.

This is the first of three related papers submitted to PSR for publication in the following order: I – Local kin groups in a central Luzon barrio; II – Ambilineal kin groups in a central Luzon barrio; and III – Central Luzon kin groups in the Philippine context. It is my hope (and the Editor's) that colleagues interested in Philippine social organization will use the pages of PSR to react to the formulations I present in this article and the two that will follow.

Introduction

This paper is about suprafamilial groups among the northern Tagalog. More explicitly, these groups are corporate groups whose components are family-households.¹ My use of the word "group," therefore, takes issue with that of Kaut, who also sees Tagalog families forming larger social alignments, but has stated (1965: 3) that

The specific membership of these social alignments constitute what I wish to designate as social "groupings" rather than social "groups." The former consists of individuals who through choice and circumstance have aligned themselves, while the latter's membership is prescribed and delimiting.

Groups and groupings

For Kaut, who uses Nadel's definition of

group,² a social group is also "an institutional unit which maintains its identity through variable periods of time primarily by means of a prescribed system of recruitment" (1965: 2). The Tagalog, he says, do not have suprafamilial groups as unilineal societies have. Instead they have "groupings," whose shapes and dimensions are not determined by "prescriptive rules of descent, inheritance, and alliance" (1965: 4). Kaut has apparently not taken Goodenough's suggestion (1961: 1343) that "it is high time we buried once and for all the notion that unilinearity or its absence is the basic conceptual distinction by which to organize kin group theory."

Kaut does allow, however, that the Tagalog family is "probably" a group, but it is "a relatively short-lived unit since marriage of the offspring brings about decomposition and re-alignment" (1965: 3). (It could as well, perhaps better, be argued that marriage of the offspring just as often brings new members into the group.) Kaut's conclusion here, like his concern with descent, reflects a reliance on theories and concepts developed from and specific to, for the most part, unilineal societies of Africa.³ When compared with the perpetuity of the unilineal kin group, the related nuclear family appears secondary,

ephemeral,⁴ and not really a group—a temporary grouping of persons. When, however, the family is a “social concept leading to formation of particular social alignments” (Kaut 1965: 3), then it becomes what Appell (1967: 3) has called “the most important corporate grouping, the most important structural unit. It is the consistent, constant relations between such social groupings which provides much of the structure to . . . societies [of the Philippines and Borneo].”

Appell does not distinguish between “group” and “groupings,” nor shall I do so in this paper, because the distinction between those groups which recruit members by prescribed rules of descent, and therefore may have “a ‘lifetime’ extending beyond that of any of its members” (Kaut 1965: 2) and those which do not do so is based on accidental regional differences. These differences do not affect the group-ness of the Philippine groups which I shall discuss here and which, incidentally, fit Nadel’s concept of “group” which is used by Kaut (see note 2).

It is locality rather than descent which forms the basis of the Tagalog local kin groups. There is nothing unique in this. As Goodenough has stated, “There are many examples in the ethnographic literature which make it obvious that local groups may be structured as kin groups . . .” (1961: 1346).

The research site

These groups are found adjoining one another in a larger social unit, a barrio. The barrio in this case is the principal sitio of Barrio Pulo of San Isidro, Nueva Ecija. The Tagalog-speaking people of Pulo are with few exceptions landless people who until very recently farmed rice under the *kasamá*, or share tenant, system.

Pulo’s inhabitants for the most part know one another quite well, are more often than not related to one another, join together for funerals, fiestas and other events and think of themselves — and are thought of — as *mga taga Pulo* (‘those from Pulo’). There are so many of them, however (1255 in all), that people at one end of the barrio may go weeks, or even months, without seeing people from the other end, and because of this — or maybe even contributing to it — day-to-day interaction takes place in smaller groups. These are the local kin groups.

Local Kin Groups

A concise definition or description of Pulo’s local kin groups is impossible because they vary in their size and structural features. In general, however, they can be said to consist of groups of two or more adjoining, or nearly adjoining, households which are consanguineally, and sometimes affinally, related, whose members exhibit patterns of constant visiting and sharing. Households, rather than individuals, are the constituent units of the local kin groups. In Pulo there are 32 of these groups, ranging in size from two to 19 households with an average of almost five. All together they include 157 of the barrio’s 199 houses. The 42 remaining houses stand alone. Of these latter, many relate to one or more of the local kin groups but are not “nearly adjoining” those in which they have kin nor do they have kin in those which they adjoin. Ten of these have squatted on land where there were no houses before; some are newcomers to the barrio; and for a few I have no information.

In the simplest case, relatives who live on a single houselot are included in the same local kin group. The group can then be extended beyond the houselot to other adjoining or nearly adjoining households where there are relatives, and it will end where there cease to be any relatives. But, because of the extensive nature of the Tagalog generational kinship system, most persons can use “relative” in referring to a majority of persons throughout Pulo. Thus, other defining factors must also be discovered.

A problem arises because Pulo’s local kin groups are unlabeled and are not identifiable absolutely. There is no Tagalog term which congruently fits the local kin group, although local terms and concepts contribute toward its identification. Furthermore, for any given group the inclusion or exclusion of individual households might be disputed or, perhaps, greater familiarity with particular groups on the investigator’s part might have suggested counting two of them as one. This lack of absolute definition, however, does not make the local kin groups any less entitled to be called groups; it is merely a manifestation of the informality and lack of precision that characterizes all of Tagalog social organization. However, this lack should not be

interpreted to mean that the Tagalog are characterized by a "loose" social organization. On the contrary, individuals are expected to conform and do conform very closely to group standards.

Despite the lack of a Tagalog term for local kin group in use in Pulo, the local kin groups do exist, and the people recognize them. The closest the people come to labeling them is to refer, for example, to *silá Juaning* (lit. 'they Juaning,' or 'Juaning and his group'). Juaning could be the eldest active male of the group or merely a friend of the speaker. The comprehension of "and his group" varies with the context. It could refer, for example, to the children of a household, a household, a work group, or a local kin group. There are, however, three kinds of relationships, two of which have already been mentioned, for which there are local terms and which contribute towards determining Pulo's kin groups. They are: *magkapitbahay*, *magkamag-anak*, and *magkasambahay*.

Magkapitbahay

A *kapitbahay* is a neighbor, and people who are *magkapitbahay* are neighbors. Not only are their houses geographically close, but they generally engage in varying amounts of reciprocal relations.

Although there is an explicit ideal of temporary postmarital residence in the husband's parents' house, followed by some other kind of virilocal residence,⁵ several Pulo women make their postmarital residence in Pulo, in their own local kin groups (see Charts 1 and 2), or in their parents' houses. This is due chiefly to the interaction of two factors. First, the nuclear household is a very close unit, characterized not only by sibling solidarity, but also close parent-child ties. A couple will be pleased, therefore, to have their married children — both sons and daughters — stay near them after marriage, and the sibling group will be pleased to remain together.

The second factor influencing the choice of residence is the availability of land — land for working and land for dwelling. Central Luzon is experiencing a population explosion and an increasing scarcity of farms for men reaching the age and status where they need one. Accord-

ingly, these men must find work on a relative's farm or elsewhere. There is also a shortage of lots on which to build a house. Although a few people have their own houselots, many farmers live on lots allotted by the owners of the land they farm. Many more, however, live on the lots of relatives who hold them in the above or other ways.⁶ Thus, postmarital residence is frequently determined by the availability of a farm (or, more realistically, the need for help on one's relative's farm) and the availability of a houselot or space on one's relative's houselot.

Magkamag-anak

A *kamag-anak*⁷ is a consanguineal or affinal relative of any kind. People who believe or know that they are somehow related are *magkamag-anak*.

The people of Pulo, and the Tagalog in general, recognize and classify their kin outside the nuclear family cognatically. There is no lineal emphasis in the kinship system. Their vocative kin terms make very little distinction between siblings and cousins, between parents and parents' siblings of the same sex, between persons of the same sex in the grandparental generation, or between persons in the descending generations, all according to the so-called Hawaiian generational principle. Their terms of reference, however, distinguish the nuclear family from other relatives and would, therefore, be classified with the Eskimo type.

These two different terminological systems, which are often extended to affines, reflect two outstanding characteristics of Tagalog social organization: (1) The solidarity of the nuclear family, which is stressed by the Eskimo-type terms of reference, and (2) the role of the nuclear family as a constituent element and prime analogate in the formation and recognition of other kin groups, which is demonstrated by the Hawaiian-type extension of nuclear-family terms to others. The extension of primary kin terms to nonprimary relatives, and the extension of consanguineal terms to affinals reflect the Tagalog proclivity to form social groupings in which both the nuclear family and the sibling bond figure prominently.

Magkasambahay

Literally, two people who live in the same house are magkasambahay, but in Pulo this term is more comprehensive. It is also extended to persons who "feel at home" in one another's houses, who are always welcome there, and who when visiting deport themselves as members of the household rather than as guests.

Interaction of the three relationships

The three relationships serve to relate the individual members of the local kin group to one another, but this is only secondary. It is as a member of a household that the individual relates to the local kin group. Households are the constituent units of the local kin group, and the three kinds of relationships operate in pulling the households of a particular local kin group together.

Thus, the magkapitbahay relationship is a result of the choice of a couple or the head of a household as to where the household will be located. Because of this choice, they, their children, and future children born into the household will belong to a particular local kin group. The household, in brief, plays a major role in the individual's local-kin-group affiliation, which is quite different from affiliation with a descent group, for example, where the location or any other characteristic of the household is irrelevant.

Merely being neighbors does not make households members of the same local kin group; there must also be the fact of kinship or the magkamag-anak relationship. Because of the large numbers of kin available in the Tagalog kin system, the choice of the location of a household usually involves the exclusion of many consanguineal and affinal relatives of the couple or the head of the household from day-to-day, face-to-face activities and — if the household is to be part of a local kin group — the inclusion of certain others. This choice is also made in terms of the household.

The magkapitbahay and magkamag-anak relationships also have structural roles in the definition of the local kin groups. The magkapitbahay concept is seen in the fact that the households are adjoining or nearly adjoining; the magkamag-anak concept is seen in the fact that these households are consanguineally and sometimes affinally related to one another, normally

through the male head of the household or his wife. These structural features, however, only serve to relate these households to one another in terms of location and kinship. As they stand, they do not necessarily define groups; they may merely be curious features of a selected population. For groups to be significant there must be some kind of group interaction, and for Pulo's local kin groups this interaction is recognized in the concept of magkasambahay, which can be freely translated as patterns of constant visiting and sharing. A person who is one's kasambahay is always welcome in all parts of the house; he does not wait to be invited, but comes right in; he does not ask if he may borrow something, for he is welcome to take what he needs. He is, in short, allowed to act almost as if he were a member of the household.

Patterns of visiting and sharing are not restricted to local kin groups. Individuals visit and share goods and services with persons outside their local kin groups. But the interaction here is less intense and is carried out in terms of dyads and on occasion, rather than in terms of the day-to-day, face-to-face group activity which characterizes the local kin groups.

All members of a local kin group are magkasambahay, but the kasambahay relationship does not define the group, because some individuals within the group will have kasambahay relationships with scattered households outside of it or in local kin groups where they do not reside. But if the concept is used in conjunction with the other two concepts, then the local kin groups can be described as those in which each of the households — and consequently each of the individuals — are magkapitbahay, magkamag-anak, and magkasambahay to all others.

It does not necessarily follow, however, that households which are magkapitbahay and magkamag-anak are necessarily magkasambahay.

In one case, for example, a man had relatives in the households on either side of him, but he was magkasambahay with neither of these houses. Apparently a dispute over inheritance had contributed to this. This case, however, is rare. Normally, when relatives who live close to one another do not get along, one of them will move somewhere else. In other words, when

people who are magkapitbahay and magkamaganak are not magkasambahay, they normally soon cease to be magkapitbahay. This helps give definition to the local kin group. Furthermore, when a couple are thinking of setting up their household near relatives, they take into consideration how smoothly they will be able to get along with these relatives.

Some Local Kin Groups of Pulo

It is the married persons within the household (generally, the male head of the household or his wife) who relate the individual households to the group according to a variety of forms, most of which fall under two general headings: (1) filiation, "the fact of being the child of a specified parent" (Fortes 1959: 206), and (2) "the interaction of the sibling bond and the conjugal tie in the sphere of local organization" (Pehrson 1957: 89). A segment of the barrio has been selected to illustrate this (see the charts and map). The letters D, E, F, G, and H are arbitrary designations of kin groups both on the kin charts and the map, where they are circumscribed. The numerals on the kinship chart designate the male head of household and his wife (or the widowed head of household) and correspond to the household numbers on the map. The numbers in parentheses indicate that the person dwells in that house but is not the head of household or his wife.

The filiation principle operates in households 43 and 44 of group F, in 25 and 26 of E, and elsewhere. In each of these cases the husband or wife relate to the group through their parents. The sibling bond relates households to the local kin group in households 18, 21, and 22 of group D; in 23, 24, 26 and 30 of group E; and elsewhere. Considering further that the generational-type terminology classifies cousins as siblings (at least in the vocative system), the sibling group stands out as a "fundamental building block" (Pehrson 1957: 68) of Pulo social structure. The conjugal tie also plays a role in joining sibling groups to local kin groups in Pulo. Although this occurs only once in the barrio segment selected for this paper (the husband in household 36 and his brother), it occurs elsewhere in Pulo.

The problem arises as to how to distinguish close from distant relatives in defining local kin groups from one another. One way of doing this is through the use of the concept *isáng tiyán* (lit. 'one stomach'). This refers to segmentary groups made up of individuals descended from a common ancestor (i.e., coming from a common womb or "stomach") and — by extension — their spouses. Thus, the wife in household 70 of group H says of households 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, and 70 "we are *isáng tiyán* and they (the other houses of group H) are another *tiyán*." Also, people in group E agreed with me that they were *dalawang tiyán* ("two stomachs"), households 27, 29, 40, and 42 as opposed to the rest. The idea of *tiyán*, although lineal, is not matrilineal as might be implied by the "womb" concept. This is illustrated by the fact that the members of the second *tiyán* in group E are the children and descendants of two different wives of one man.

Combining the concepts *isáng tiyán* and kapitbahay is useful for delineating local kin groups. Thus, the common ancestress of group D was the full sister of the twice-married man in group E, but the fact that D's houses form a separate, although contiguous, cluster from E's helps in defining D as a separate group. The two *tiyán* of E and those of H, however, are in houses which are intermingled with one another as kapitbahay, and hence E and H are regarded as single groups. Not all the kamaganak in a particular local kin group belong to the same one or two *tiyán*. There are sometimes one or two more distant relatives and their families included (although this does not occur in any of the cases illustrated here).

Visiting and Sharing

Most of the local kin groups of Pulo are structurally similar to extended families, while a few are more complex. But regardless of how they are structured these are the groups in which all important day-to-day, face-to-face interaction outside of the nuclear family takes place. They are natural groups in that they develop from the nuclear family, and, although they are exogamous, they tend to reproduce themselves.

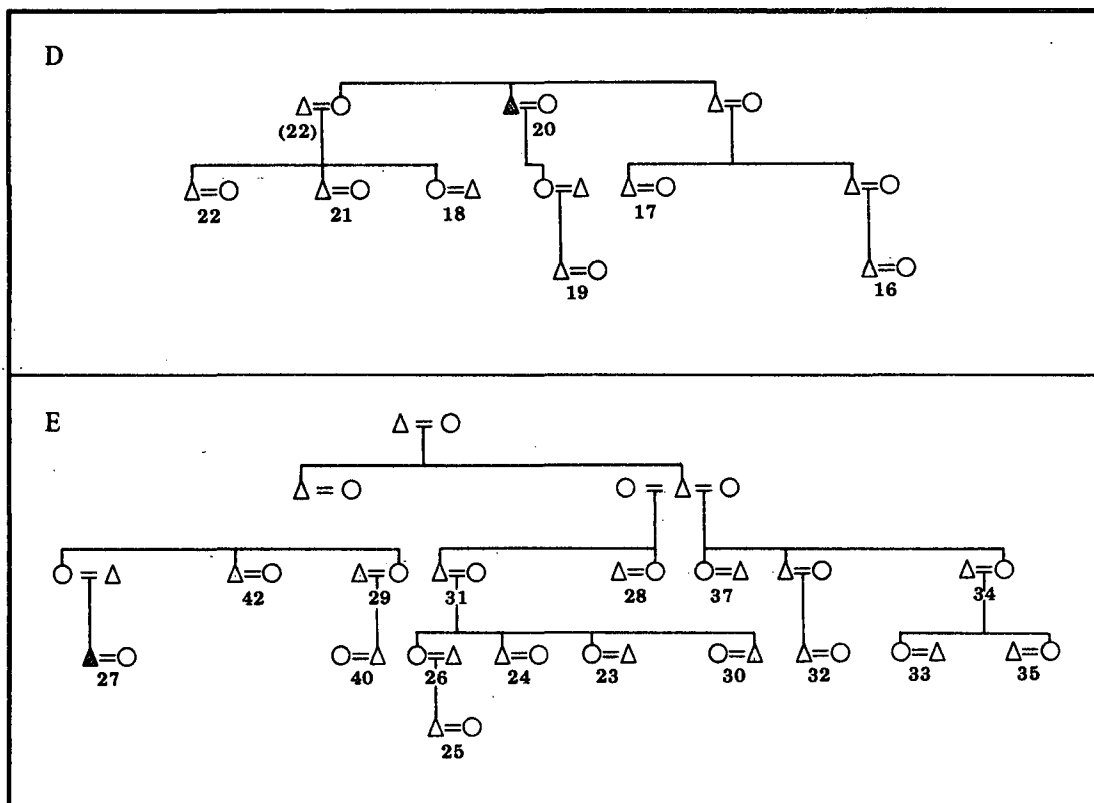


Chart 1 – Kinship diagrams of local kin groups D and E

The ties which bind households together into these groups are normally close, frequently sibling or parent-child relationships which began in nuclear-family households. These households, far from breaking up and disappearing, have contributed at least part of their structure to the local kin groups. And although these structural components are no longer localized under the same roof, they are localized in the same local kin groups. Furthermore, the members of the household are never localized 100 percent of the time in the household, but interact constantly with the other members of the local kin group. Later on, many of those who form their own new households (families of procreation) continue to interact and be localized with their former households (families of orientation) in the same local kin groups where much of their interaction took place prior to the realignment of households. Thus the structure and the interaction, in part at least, continue.

The continued interaction is in the form of constant visiting, sharing of food and other goods, and exchange of work. Houses are close, walls are thin, a *kasambahay* does not need an invitation, and so the members of the local kin group are with one another constantly. If someone catches a large mess of fish or is given several coconuts, he shares them with the local kin group.

Members of the group also assist one another in tasks which are normally carried out by members of the household, such as baby tending, food preparation, and caring for the carabao. Furthermore, when small work groups are needed for agricultural and other tasks, they are frequently recruited from within the local kin group.

In conclusion, the local kin group is the day-to-day, face-to-face group for most of its members (particularly for the very old and the very young). Although component nuclear-family

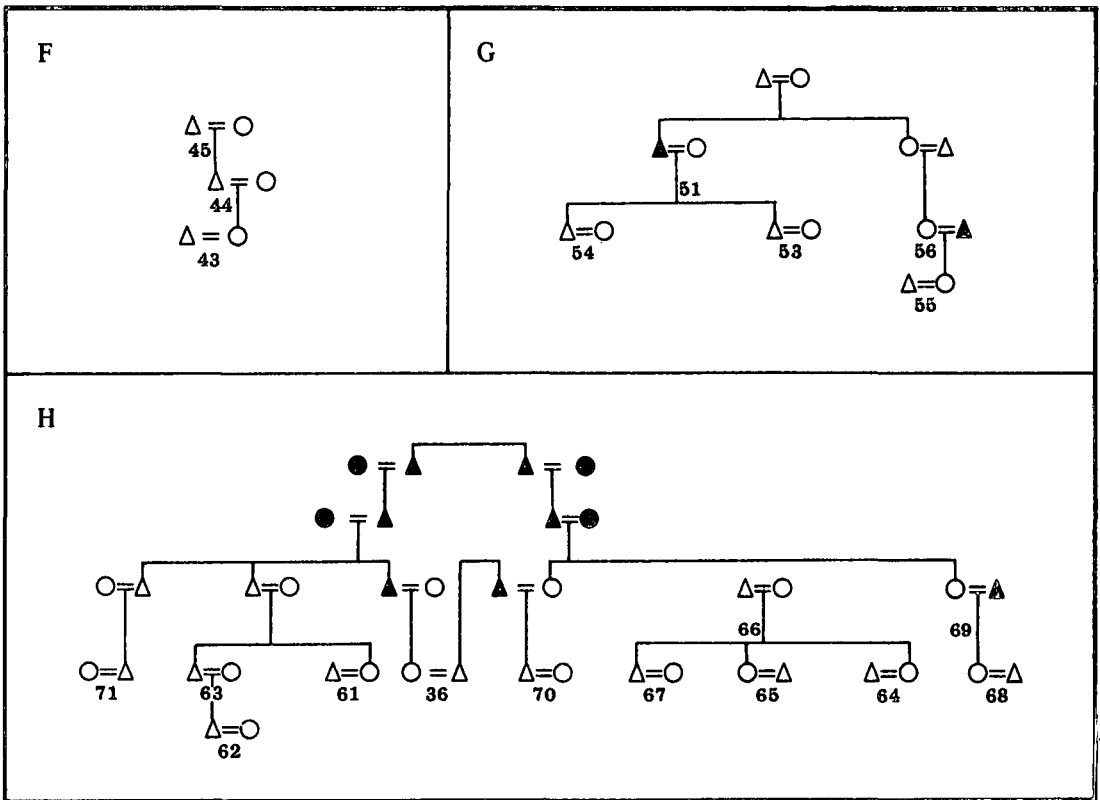
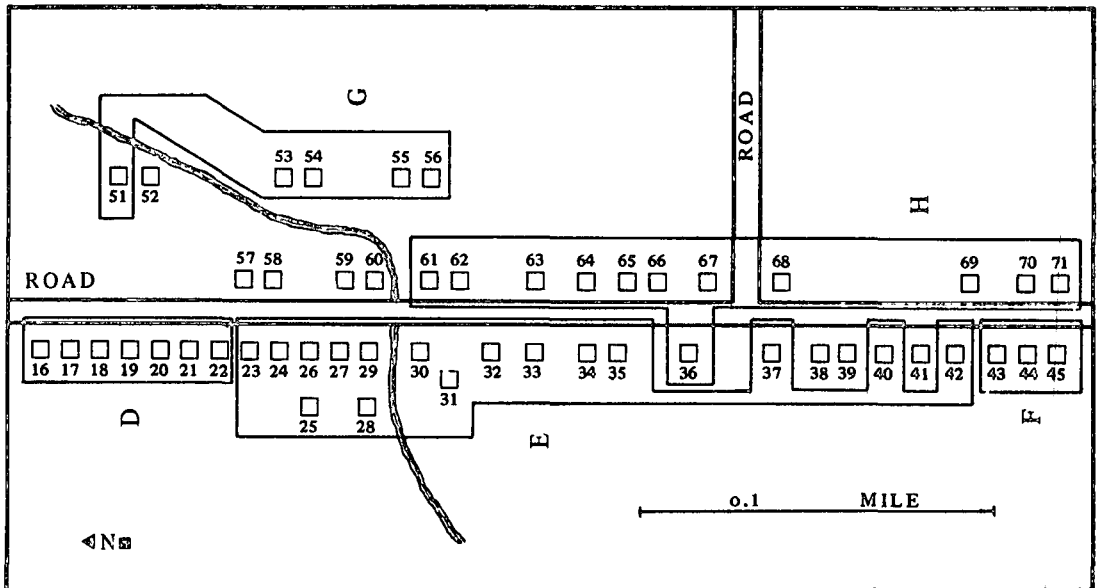


Chart 2 – Kinship diagrams of local kin groups F, G, and H



Map 1 – Local kin groups D-H
Pulo, San Isidro, Nueva Ecija, 1966-68

households are distinguishable from one another in terms of separate roofs, interaction patterns make this distinction less clear at all phases of the nuclear family's development. Families, far from being short-lived, are allowed to continue on in a certain sense for generations. Thus, the local kin group makes it unnecessary for a family to break up, allowing it instead to live on beyond the lives of any of its members — somewhat in the manner of a unilineal group.

Notes

The data used in this paper were gathered in Barrio Pulo, San Isidro, Nueva Ecija, Philippines, between November 1966 and January 1968. The research was supported by U. S. Public Health Fellowships from the National Institutes of Health (Nos. 1-F1-MH-30, 483-01A1 and 5-F1-MH-30, 483-02) and a supplemental grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (No. MH-13, 091). Parts of the author's doctoral dissertation (Murray 1970) have been modified and incorporated into this article.

The author has since done further research in the Philippines (1971-72) as a visiting research associate of the Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila (see his overview of Philippine land reform in *PSR* 20[1-2]: 151-68). Dr. Murray is currently on the anthropology staff of the University of Western Australia, Perth.

1. Most households in Pulo are nuclear family households (111 out of a sample of 174) or variations thereof, the most common variation being the three-generation vertically-extended household (29 out of 174). See Murray 1970: 103-107.

2. Nadel defines a group (1951: 146) as "... a collection of individuals who stand in regular and relatively permanent relationships, that is, who act towards and in respect of each other, or towards and in respect of individuals outside the group, regularly in a specific, predictable, and expected fashion. The relationships making up the group are therefore visible only in the institutionalized modes of co-activity. The latter appear as the *rights and obligations* vested in or incumbent upon the individuals in virtue of their group membership, either as modes of action reserved for (or forbidden to) the members of the group, or as modes of action generally valid but typically modified when occurring between group members."

3. I am inferring this from the text of Kaut's article (1965). Much of social organization theory has its roots in unilineal societies. It is only in the past 15 years that attention has been paid to cognatic societies, but the development of theory here has been quite slow.

In this and in forthcoming papers I disagree on several points with Kaut. This is because he is the only other person who writes on the same subject, and not

because I am grinding an axe. In fact, I have learned very much from reading Kaut's papers.

4. Evans-Prichard, an eminent Africanist, has concluded (1940: 262) that the family is an ephemeral, nonstructural unit. This is undoubtedly true for the Nuer.

5. Residence patterns in Pulo are quite complex and revolve around whether the in-marrying spouse comes from Pulo or not and whether he/she moves into his/her spouse's parents' house or local kin group, or into a neolocal residence. See Murray 1970: Chapter VI.

6. Houselot tenure in Pulo is somewhat more involved than is indicated here. See Murray 1970: 114-15.

7. My use of this term is academic. It normally describes more distant relatives. No Tagalog speaker — and no English speaker — would refer to his mother or father as "my relative."

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