

LOWLAND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION III: CENTRAL LUZON KIN GROUPS IN THE PHILIPPINE CONTEXT

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Despite the very different ecologies and political organizations of the former Mountain Province and the Tagalog area, five basic social units appear in both areas: the village, the nuclear family, local and ambilineal kin groups (described in previous papers), and the kindred (introduced in this paper). Previous lowland studies have either ignored these units or confused them with one another, but they may well hold the key to systematic analysis of Philippine social organization in general.

In two previous papers (1973a and 1973b) I discussed two types of lowland kin group which are distinct from each other and from the ego-centered kindred as well. These types are the following.

(1) Local kin groups. These are impossible to define or describe concisely 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, and whose members exhibit patterns of constant visiting and sharing.

(2) Ambilineal kin groups or *angkán*. These are interest groups composed of persons descended from a common ancestor, and their spouses, who recognize themselves and are recognized as a single group. These groups are normally confined to the limits of a single barrio, but are not localized within it. There are no prescribed rules for affiliation into these groups, but choice and circumstance contribute to the individual's becoming part of one of the several groups with which he has the proper kinship connections.

Both these types of group are found in the principal sitio of barrio Pulo of San Isidro, Nueva Ecija. The people of Pulo are Tagalog-speakers who until recently worked their rice farms under the *kasamá* system.

The Kindred

The groups described above, along with the household,¹ are absolute inasmuch as they are not relative to any single individual but have the same form for all individuals within the group. The kindred (cf. Murdock 1960: 3ff.), on the other hand, is relative to a particular individual. In Pulo the kindred is a cognatic ego-centered kin group, not embracing the total *angkán* of one's parents, but only the near relatives of the individual. Like kindreds everywhere else, and like the local kin group and the *angkán*, the kindred in Pulo is not well-defined; its presence, however, is inevitable.

If an individual leaves the household or local kin group in which he or she has been raised to go and live in another, that individual still maintains ties with the former household or local kin group and his or her descendents do the same. Or, when a person identifies with his father's *angkán*, he does not completely exclude all those persons who are identified with his mother's *angkán*. Thus, virtually every individual in Pulo has relatives as close as siblings, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and first cousins who are not members of his local kin group, his *angkán*, or even his barrio, with whom he maintains close, intimate ties. These people make up his kindred.

Although kindreds cross local-kin-group, *angkán*, and even barrio lines, the members must

be known and available. An uncle or a cousin whom the individual has never met or seen is not a member of the kindred. Likewise, an aunt or a grandparent who lives so far away from Pulo as to be scarcely even seen is also not a member of the kindred. These people are thought of as close relatives and would be members of the kindred if they were available, but physical separation for extended periods of time prevent them from being members of the group.

Thus, the kindred is an effective group made up of primary, secondary, and sometimes tertiary, relatives who are known and available. Other relatives outside this group are considered as close, but because they do not interact in the kindred, they are not members of it.

Each individual's kindred is unique in its composition, because it is ego-centered. It is also unique in its structure, because each is affected by different life histories, group compositions, patterns of daily behaviour, and so forth. It is therefore very difficult to give a precise structural definition of the kindred in general or for a particular society, although some general statements can be made.

First of all, the Tagalog kindred includes living ancestors and descendents, but usually does not extend out much beyond second cousins, and this seems to be a function of the very strong nuclear family and sibling bond. Thus, for example, two sisters may be very close and they – along with their parents – will actually strive to make their children, who are first cousins, close to one another. These first cousins, if they are close, will in their turn endeavour to make their children, who are second cousins, close to one another, and this will be encouraged by their parents and their grandparents, the two original sisters. But, by the time the second cousins have their own children, the two original sisters will probably be dead, and the number of third cousins will be so large that the group will segment into several smaller groups of first or second cousins who are more intimate. Of course, there will be many exceptions, but this is generally the kind of process that takes place.

Secondly, affines are included in the kindred because husbands and wives merge their kindreds

at marriage.² In fact, the ego-centered kindred which affects the household is not in terms of the husband or the wife individually but in terms of both of them. Kaut (1961: 267) states that the Tagalog kindred "includes the personal kindreds of both the mother and father." I would agree with this as long as these personal kindreds are understood as groups with whom the parents interact. Another way of looking at it is to see the parents as sharing the kindred of their children. It is this kindred which is the effective group, and in this respect the kindred might better be looked at as a household-oriented group rather than an ego-oriented one.

In terms of kinship – i. e., relating to relatives *per se* – the kindred is the most important group for the household. Although not all members of the kindred live in the local kin group – and often members of the local kin group are only marginal to the kindred (e. g. third and fourth cousins) – they are constantly sought out and visited for the pleasure of their company, for favors, and frequently for work requiring large groups or special skills. Furthermore, it is the kindred who plays the most important roles and who also do the work and bear the expenses at baptisms, weddings, and funerals. They are also the group that is consulted when major decisions are to be made such as whether a particular child should be sent on to high school or college.

In terms of the barrio the kindred serves two important roles. First of all, members of different local kin groups and different *angkan* belong to overlapping kindreds which serve to entwine these various groupings into the unity that is the barrio. Secondly, persons whose kindreds include persons from neighboring barrios provide one of the few links in the very weak inter-barrio chain.

The Kindred and Other Kin Groups

There is general agreement among anthropologists who have studied lowland groups in the Philippines that the household and the barrio are important social units. In addition, the kindred, or something like it, is usually reported. But, to my knowledge no one else has made distinctions among the local kin group, the

angkán, and the kindred. Kaut (1965: 10–11) talks about “clusters of houses,” “angkán or kindred,” and “an individual’s personal kindred,” which might relate to the three concepts under discussion, but which may, perhaps, be less distinct.

There are several possible explanations as to why these groups have not been singled out in other lowland areas. Among these are the following.

(1) Perhaps these groups are not present in the particular communities that have been studied either because they have never developed or because, as Eggan (1967: 200) suggests, acculturation has effected variations in the lowland social systems.

(2) Kin group theory has been so tied up with unilineal societies that much of what has been said about kin groups does not apply to those found in cognatic societies. A result of this might possibly be that groups have not been recognized or assumed not to exist.

(3) The groups may not have been sought out or reported in the Philippines because of the traditional distinction that is made between mountain peoples and lowland peoples.

Mountains vs. Lowlands

There is apparently an assumption held by many that because there are marked differences in the economic life, acculturation, life style, and political organization of the people of the old Mountain Province and those of the lowland peasants, there must also be major differences in the respective social organizations. Groups, such as local kin groups and ambilineal descent groups are relegated to the Mountain Province area. Descent groups and local kin groups, however, are not antithetical to peasant life. Wolf (1966: 87) states that “many stranded coalitions built up of vertical, polyadic ties among peasants are best exemplified by the kin organization called the descent group. Descent groups are of two kinds, local descent groups and multi-local, or political, descent groups.”

Thus, investigations of the similarities between mountain peoples and lowland peoples may yield very useful results: A case in point is the similarity of Tagalog and Kalinga social

structures. Dozier (1967: 15–23) reports that within the Kalinga “region” there are villages which are made up of households and extended households. These are structurally similar to the Tagalog barrio – and the Kalinga sometimes use this term – with its households and local kin groups (many of which are extended households). He also reports “bilateral descent groups” which he carefully distinguishes from the kindred or “kinship circle.” “The bilateral descent group is quite a different kind of organization from the personal kindred. While in bilateral descent groups the whole group receives emphasis, in personal kindreds the individual is the focus of attention” (1967: 20). These two social units are the structural equivalents of the Tagalog kindred and ambilineal kin group. Thus, both the Tagalog and Kalinga are characterized by the same five structural units at the village level and below.

Similarities can also be seen among the Kankanay of Sagada and the Bontok who have the same social units as the above except for the local kin group or extended household, instead of which they have the ward. “The households comprising a ward form a social unit (*obon*), which cooperates for certain purposes but is not a kinship unit” (Eggan 1960: 28). However, the ward traditionally may not have been as structurally distinct from the local kin group as it is today. Keesing (1949: 587) suggests that the wards may once have been units which were based on patrilocal residence, and this would tie them in with extended households and local kin groups. Perhaps both the ward and the local kin group have a common origin in the extended household and their present forms can be explained historically in terms of different ecologies and political organizations. But, despite the very different ecologies and political organizations of Mountain Province and the Tagalog area, the presence of a village, the nuclear family, and bilateral social organization has, in at least some cases, given rise to three other structural types – the kindred, the local kin group and the ambilineal kin group. The functions of the five social units will, of course, vary greatly from group to group depending on the kinds of adaptations they have

made to the physical environment and the greater society.

Conclusion

Because local kin groups, ambilineal kin groups, and kindreds are not prescriptive, formally organized, or well-defined, there is a tendency to confuse them with one another. And because relationships between individuals and households occur in dyads, are "based upon contingent criteria" (Kaut 1965: 3), and function in *ad hoc* situations within the limits of a generalized "kindred," it is easy to overlook the fact that other kinds of group exist.

Kin groups, however, may hold the key to systematic analysis of Philippine social organization in general. Where kin groups have been reported they seem, at least structurally, to present cross-cultural similarities. Much more data must be gathered, and social scientists working in the lowlands must be persuaded to look for kin groups other than the kindred.

Notes

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Dr. Murray has published two other articles on social organization in recent issues of PSR (see the references, below). He received the Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Pittsburgh (1970) and is currently on the anthropology faculty of the University of Western Australia at 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 (20 out of 174) (cf. Murray 1970: 103-7).

2 The merger is made quite explicit in the use of *compadrazgo* terminology by the parents of the spouses for one another.

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