Family Changes

ed. by Tiziano Tosolini

Asian Study Centre
Xaverian Missionaries – Japan

FAMILY CHANGES

Asian Study Centre Series

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Tiziano Tosolini ed., *Family Changes*. 2015.

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Published by
Asian Study Centre
Ichiba Higashi 1–103–1
598–0005 Izumisano (Osaka), Japan

Private edition, 2015

Printed in Taipei (Taiwan roc)

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Introduction

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Starting from the forthcoming synod of the Catholic Church on the Family, the essays collected in this book are a modest attempt at a reflection on the same topic, centred, however, on five different Asian contexts, that is, those of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines and Taiwan. The by now traditional phenomenological approach of the *Asian Study Centre* is applied here to family as to the basic social unit in order to unveil the changes and processes deeply affecting and reshaping it. Aging population, declining births and marriages, mono-parental families, plural and diverse family models, domestic violence, divorce, prolonged absence of parents and market dynamics, all contribute to situate the modern family in a sort of confused melting pot. Indeed, the modern family finds itself in the middle of a great transition, which, while leaving unclear its final port of destination, nevertheless allows us to clearly envisage the complexity of the refashioning it is bound to undergo.

Despite the cultural and geographical differences of the five countries under study, it appears that the family and the transition we find it in, do not differ in kind but only in degree, so that the Bangladeshi, the Indonesian, the Filipino, the Taiwanese and the Japanese families, possibly reflect only a different stage in a transformation which is affecting the whole world without distinction. In all the five papers, the situation and social status of women are taken as a measure of the changes underwent by families generally embedded in a wider patriarchal setup. A more egalitarian setting between men and women, while pointing to modern and positive achievements, does not necessarily lead to a strengthening of the family institution. Modernization is not always and everywhere an improvement on tradition.

In practice, the Bangladeshi family, examined in a historical perspective, is shown as both adaptable and resilient to the numerous socio-economic changes affecting it. While, undoubtedly, modern transformations in the economic structure of the country have created new opportunities for both men and women, at the same time they have also helped to maintain the traditional patriarchal framework of the Bengali family so as to suit both tradition and economy. Eventually, *poribar* as *sonsar* continues to reflect the universe as its microcosm.

Similarly, although from a different perspective, the Indonesian family appears to withhold the importance and influence of the extended family as against the widespread diffusion of the nuclear one. Members of the extended family may no longer live under the same roof, but they are, however, united in a clear and meaningful socio-cultural unit, which provides solidary support and financial help, if and when it is needed.

The paper on the Japanese family takes into account some of the problems affecting it: divorce, child abuse, domestic violence, homelessness, *parasaito shinguru* and *hikikomori*. The two latter conditions represent a specifically Japanese phenomenon that deserves farther explanation. The *parasaito shinguru*, an anglicism for "parasite single," is the tendency of Japanese youth to choose the security and comfort provided by their parents over married life. *Hikikomori* designates instead a kind of lethargy and isolation from social life in a self-imposed state of confinement at home. A widespread homelessness, instead, is pinpointed as the result of the implementation of radical neo-liberal policies.

Significantly, in the Philippines globalization has created international employment opportunities for migrant workers, especially women. These new opportunities have prompted many to subject themselves to much hardship in order to migrate and support their families back home. In the Philippines this has turned out to be a major agent of change. In fact, familial roles are bound to change when wives and husbands remain apart from each other for long periods of time. Finally, the paper highlights the huge human costs involved, which are not in the least compensated by an economic return.

The essay on the Taiwanese family analysis some of the challenges Chinese people face, i.e. divorce, domestic violence, extra marital affairs, economic difficulties, time consuming work, decreasing birth rate, aging society, single parents families, urbanization, diverse family formation and Internet addiction disorder. The outcome indicates

that, although the family remains at the core of cultural values and as the most precious and single factor for personal fulfilment and happiness, the above mentioned social and cultural challenges require new bonds of cohesion and support to consolidate a family which is becoming more and more fragmented and fragile.

While the papers tend to analyse, and hence emphasize the challenges confronting the modern family, the research, at the same time, also points out that the family institution has regularly proved to be very flexible and resistant in the face of various historical and social changes.

The authors wish to thank the Xaverian Missionaries for their support, those who helped us in the research and those who revised the English text: Fr. Steve McKend SX, Fr. John Fagan SX, Ms Lauren Hanson, Sr. Nancy Murphy RSCJ, Ms Rose Marie Pelaez Regalia and Alberto Bertozzi.

A special word of thanks goes to the General Direction in Rome, and the local community of Xaverian Sisters, for hosting our annual meeting in August 2015 with their exquisite hospitality.

Family Changes

Bangladesh

Sergio Targa

It cannot be denied that modern Bangladesh has undergone huge transformations at all levels. Despite persisting socio-economic and political problems, the country is no longer, if it ever had been, the "international basket case" of Kissinger's dismissive definition.[1] Indeed "Bangladesh has done better than most countries at (*sic*) improving the basic standard of living of its people. Bangladeshis, for instance, can expect to live four years longer than Indians even though they are much poorer. The country has achieved some of the largest reductions in early deaths of infants, children and women in childbirth ever seen anywhere."[2] And this is just to name but a few of the great changes referred to here. One wonders if and

1. Apparently the expression "international basket case" traditionally attributed to H. Kissinger is of ambassador U. Alexis Johnson. See A. B. M. Nasir, "The Myth of International Basket Case." In *bdnews24.com*, 6 October, 2010, at <http://opinion.bdnews24-2010-10-06-the-myth-of-%e2%80%9Cinternational-basket-case%e280%9d>.

2. J. P., "Out of the Basket." In *The Economist*, 2 November 2012, at <http://www.economist.com/blogs/feastandfamine/2012/11/bangladesh>.

how these socio-economic transformations have affected the religious, cultural and societal setup of a country generally deemed as deeply traditional. In fact, it is at this level that the present paper wishes to analyse the situation of that particular and yet fundamental institution which is the family. This latter, together with the kinship system that informs it, must be seen as organically linked to both society and state so much so that to define the traditional Bengali family as patriarchal means to identify the root of a patriarchy which is systemic in nature, that is, it involves and characterises both society and state.

Of course, this is also to say that the family as a societal institution is intertwined with economic structures and cultural norms which are never neutral but are always politically motivated. Even from such a short characterization it should be apparent that changes in the economic structure of Bangladeshi society necessarily bring about changes in the structure of the Bengali family and of its underlining cultural rules. Generally speaking, a traditional, patriarchal family is linked to a traditional, agrarian economy while a modern family relies on a kinship system modified by different and modern economic structures. As I see it, the family institution can be likened to an entropic system which is so elastic and flexible to adjust and absorb within itself a high degree of disorder, as it were, caused by intervening socio-economic transformations without reaching as yet a breaking point.

Thus while it is undeniable that in Bangladeshi society changes have taken place at all levels, it is yet to be shown how and to what extent these have affected the familial compact. This paper specifically attempts an answer to these questions, suggesting that the Bengali family has managed to withstand the onslaught, as it were, of modernity by employing two culturally strategic devices. On the one hand, the traditional kinship system on which the Bengali family relies has managed to absorb structural changes by offering a reinterpreted and modern version of itself. On the other hand, where and when changes have been perceived as going beyond the re-interpretative capacity of a traditional familial framework, the reproduction, at times also violent, of traditional models has been imposed *tout court*. Eventually, it appears to be true that today's Bengali family finds itself in the middle of a cultural transition which if it knows well its originating shore, it is however not aware, as yet at least, where its journey will end up. Indeed it appears that, with either reinterpretation or re-imposition of old models, the Bengali family remains strongly anchored to its traditional cultural framework of reference. Old values certainly, always and everywhere, die hard, not just because they are moral referents but because they embody and constitute specific power relations among individuals and groups and thus establish a moral framework of reference.

The paper is organized in four main sections. The first attempts a cultural reading of the Bengali traditional kinship system as rooted in a wider Hindu cosmological and philosophical framework. A second, shorter section, will attempt to link the previous cultural reading of kinship in Bengal with specific, traditional socio-economic and political structures. The third section will dwell basically on the intervening socio-economic changes of modern Bangladesh and on the consequent transition from an economy of

"cooperation" to one of "competition." The fourth and last section will attempt a reading of the transformations at the level of kinship system occurring in the Bengali family following the two interpretive cultural keys of "reabsorption" and "reproduction." A conclusion will sum up the findings, proposing to consider the family institution as an entropic system which is shown to be flexible enough to endure a high degree of disruption. In other words, and out of metaphor, patriarchy and the power relations it codifies will be shown to be far from being on the verge of being dismantled.

THE TRADITIONAL BENGALI KINSHIP SYSTEM IN CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

A westerner coming to Bangladesh[3] for the first time is amazed at the variety of names used by Bengalis to indicate what may appear to his or her ear as an excessive number of relatives. To a great extent Bengalis also give the impression that all the people they happen to relate to are some sort of relative. Indeed the category of *attio-sojon*[4] (literally, one's own people, i.e. relatives) is quite extended and it includes what we would call blood relatives, in-laws, friends, neighbours, etc. This cannot be understood if we forget that the Bengali kinship system relies on a particular cultural premise which is both philosophical and cosmological at the same time, that is, "all beings are organized into *jati*",[5] genera or caste and that *jati*, beyond the traditional meaning of caste, in Bengali culture comes to indicate also other levels of genera, such as territory, worship code and occupation, all layers of different substances which combine to produce the caste system proper.[6]

In this respect, the caste system is the hierarchical organization of shared and non-shared substances, bodily and not, and their inherent behavioural codes called *dharma*. What is more, *jati*, at its lower end, may also indicate smaller groupings such as a *kul* or the lineage one is born into, a *poribar* or family and one's *purush* or *stri lingo*, the masculine and female genders respectively. In Bengal *jati* may thus refer to nationality (all the people sharing a territory), to religion (all the people sharing the same code of worship, i.e. Christian, Hindu or Muslim etc.), to gender as in *nari jat* (women, i.e. the class of

3. Unless stated differently, the paper, particularly in its ethnographic material, deals with the social and cultural reality of Bangladesh proper even though, I believe, much of what said may apply to West Bengal as well.

4. I choose to write Bengali words using a spelling which may, it is hoped, approximate and facilitate the actual pronunciation of the word concerned instead of using the diacritics which, while certainly more precise, presuppose a specialized knowledge.

5. R. B. Inden and R. W. Nicholas, *Kinship in Bengali Culture* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1977), xiv.

6. Obviously, the argument here refers to a Hindu understanding of things, and while it is here recollected to highlight the historical and cosmological roots of the modern Bengali kinship system, it is beyond the scope of this paper to farther pursue this line of enquiry. Nevertheless as far as the Bengali kinship system is concerned there is no doubt that it depends and relies on a Hindu symbolic framework. This necessarily means that even the Muslims of Bengal, i.e. those who share the substance-territory Bengal, have a stake in it even though as much as their Hindu counterparts they may not be aware of it.

people sharing femaleness), to professions (the class of people sharing a profession, for instance, the *kumor jat*, the potters).

Sharing of substances, bodily or otherwise appears to be the criterion governing the category of *attio-sojon*, and within this the different levels and extent of sharing distinguishes different kinds of *attio-sojon*, which consequently may be qualified as *nikot* or *dur*, close or distant respectively.[7] Undoubtedly, it is the sharing of bodily substances which organize and distinguish *jati*, *kul*, *bonsho* and *poribar* from other sorts of sharing based on other, non-bodily substances. At this point and before proceeding farther, it is important to state that what I will be describing below as the Bengali kinship system is basically the Hindu Bengali kinship system, even though my field experience leads me to agree with R. Inden and R. Nicholas when they state that "there is a level at which we may speak of "Bengali kinship" without regard to differences between Muslims and Hindus."[8]

If *attio-sojon* is an open category employed to indicate an open set of people, not so with another Bengali compound, the *gæti-kutum*,[9] which, although not as common in usage as the *attio-sojon*, is employed to indicate a restricted class of *attio-sojon*. *Gæti-kutum* approximately and improperly may be defined as those *attio-sojon* who are related by blood (*gæti*) and by marriage (*kutum*). *Attio-sojon* and *gæti-kutum* do not necessarily refer to solidary units, being, generally speaking, "ego centred." Solidary units proper are instead the *kul* and *poribar*, clan or lineage and family respectively. The *kul* "refers to a set of one's own people, taking a "seed male" (*bija purusa, purva purusa*) and not "ego" as its referent.[10] More precisely, a *kul* is a patrilineage which includes all the male descendants of a male ancestor, together with their wives and their unmarried daughters.[11] The *kul* is definitely a sub-unit of a *jati* or caste, and as such it shares with this latter a territory-

7. For the whole question of substances (*dhatu* or *drobbo* in Bengali) and their inherent codes see R. B. Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1976). Inden's argument as far as caste/*jati* is concerned is complex and runs the risk of essentialism. Yet, I employ it because it affords an organic cultural perspective from where to attempt a comprehension of the Bengali kinship system as an element of the Bengali societal edifice.

8. R. B. Inden and R. W. Nicholas, *Kinship in Bengali Culture*, op. cit., 99. See also A. Chowdhury, "Family in Bangladesh." In AA.VV., *The Changing Family in Asia* (Bangkok: UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 1992), 65. Obviously, differences both in form, i.e. terminology, and content are present. I will point them out at the appropriate time below. The following description of the Bengali kinship system will be indebted, in the main, to this work of Inden and Nicholas. Once again, I acknowledge that the text is both dated and essentialist. Inden and Nicholas while looking for the total system of kinship within an organic and all-inclusive comprehension of the whole Bengali Hindu societal edifice forget history, its agents and their continuous capacity of ideological and practical manipulation. For a short critique of the text see Lina Fruzzetti's review in *The American Anthropologist*, no. 81, 1979, 943–44. The text, however, remains a useful starting point for a discussion on Bengali kinship.

9. In Bengali both *kutum* and *kutumbo* are used to indicate the same class of relatives.

10. R. B. Inden and R. W. Nicholas, *Kinship in Bengali Culture*, op. cit., 4.

11. Here it has to be noticed that Bengali Muslims differ from their Hindu counterparts in that the latter do worship and feed their ancestors while the former do not. This means that a *kul* for Bengali Muslims, generally speaking and at least at the level of consciousness, does not include dead ancestors. See ibid., 99.

substance, an occupation-substance and a worship-substance.[12] People belonging to the same *kul* are referred to as *sokullo* and *sogotro*. Indeed in Bengali *gotro*, *bonsho* and *gosthi* are used almost as synonyms of *kul* even though they do have their own specialised meaning. The *gotro*, for instance, originally was used only for Brahmans and in that case the *gotro* was identical with *kul*, that is, it was defined by shared bodily substance, i.e. the seed/blood of an ancestral male. The term thus specifically indicated a Brahman *kul*. In time, however, what used to be the name of an ancestral Brahman substance, particularly related to Vedic coded substance, came to indicate, instead, the Vedic name of a common priest, preceptor or guru (*rishi* or seer of old) shared by people regardless of their different *kul* or *jati* belonging. *Gotro*, however, is less important in defining a solidary kinship unit than it is to worship purposes.[13]

The term *bonsho* in that it refers to the male-seed substance is identical with *kul*. However, its specialised meaning refers only to the succession of males (*purush porompora*) without considering and actually excluding their in-marrying wives or their out-marrying daughters. Finally, *gosthi* appears to be specifically related to all those members of a *kul* physically living under the same roof. In other words if all those people sharing the same ancestor belong to the same *kul*, only those *kul* members who live together are called a *gosthi* (a localized patrilineage or descent group).[14]

Last but not least, we must now take into consideration the term *poribar* (family), something already mentioned several times above but not as yet explained. The *poribar* is a subset of a *kul*, but unlike the latter, it takes a living rather than a dead male as its referent. "It includes persons related by shared bodily substance to a common living man called a *svami* or 'master:' his wife, his sons, his sons' wives and sons, and perhaps even their wives and sons."[15] Significantly, it has to be considered that only unmarried daughters are considered, temporarily, part and parcel of their father's *poribar*. In fact when they get married they will cease to be part of their paternal family, joining instead, for all purposes, their husband's. This applies more generally to the *kul* as well. A *kul*, as we know, comprises of all the people sharing in the same bodily substance originating from a primordial male ancestor. In this group of people also in-marrying wives are included while out-marrying daughters are excluded. The fundamental reason behind this codification is that "women as wives pass their husbands' blood to the children, and in this way in-marrying women transmit the *bongso*'s blood and carry, preserve and save the

12. See R. B. Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture*, op. cit., 17.

13. However, it is still the case that when it comes to marriages, they should be performed between people of different *gotro*s. *Gotro* exogamy is still a rule particularly among high caste Hindus. This can be explained either by recalling the original meaning of *gotro* as identical with *kul*, or more aptly referring to worship and its capacity in general to transform and affect substances.

14. See R. B. Inden and R. W. Nicholas, *Kinship in Bengali Culture*, op. cit., 8. Notably, for Bengali Muslims, *gosthi* is basically assimilated to *bonsho* and used tout court instead of *kul*.

15. Ibid., 5.

male line."[16] Apparently, marriage changes the *gotro* of women but not their blood. In fact women do continue to be related to their father's blood but that is as far as it goes: their fathers' relation to *sopindo* ends with them.[17]

The word *poribar* etymologically appears to mean "dependable or dependent" and thus points primarily to the wife or *stri* who by definition is the first dependent of a *shami* (husband and master). Yet, husband and wife are not considered enough to constitute a *poribar*. In fact at least a son is necessary to bring forward the father's *kul*. However, normally a minimal *poribar* is comprised by a set of eight relationships which limit and at the same time highlight the closest (*nikottomo*) bodily relationships among one's *attio-sojon*. These are the relationships between *shami* and *stri* (husband and wife), *jonok* and *jonaki* or *baba* and *ma* (genitor and genetrix or father and mother), *chele* and *meye* (son and daughter) and *bhai* and *bon* (brother and sister).

Anthropologists may identify this *poribar* with the nuclear or conjugal or elemental family as opposed to the joint or extended one. However, it should be considered that in Bengali culture what has been called a minimal family is actually and structurally open to additions. Dependents, in the form of additional sons and daughters, may increase the *poribar*. But so can the addition of one's sons' wives and their respective sons. This latter set of relations while constituting a sub-set of a *poribar* does not constitute a new *poribar per se* as long as the first independent master remains alive. Obviously, this second enlarged group of dependables (*poribar*) would approximate the joint or extended family. Apparently for Bengalis what we may call minimal and maximal families are not seen as opposed or antithetic institutional forms of each other, instead they are seen more as a gradual unfolding of a linear process of body sharing. "All the persons related by sharing the body of the same living master, no matter how many 'lineally' or 'collaterally' related males there may be, constitute his *parivara-varga*, the aggregate of his bodily dependants."[18]

All husbands or *shami*s present in a *poribar* are indeed masters for their respective dependants, i.e. wife and children. However, these that are lesser masters all depend on the living patriarch who is master *par excellence* and distinguished by the term *korta*, the doer, he who acts. *Korta* here relates to the independence of the master in performing and acting, something which originally and specifically involved ritual action, the offering of sacrifices, the highest *kormo* (action) enjoined to a householder. A *poribar* usually

16. L. Fruzzetti, A. Ostor, S. Barnett, "The Cultural Construction of the Person in Bengal and Tamil Nadu," *Contribution to Indian Sociology*, 1976, 10/1: 168.

17. See ibid., 168. The term *sopindo* means "of the same body" and refers to the immediate ascending seven ancestors (*sat purush*) of a *shami* (the living master of a *poribar*, the husband). See Ralph W. Nicholas, "Sraddha, impurity and relations between the living and the dead." In *Contribution to Indian Sociology*, vol. 15, 1981, 367–79. The change in *gotro* (*gusthi* for Muslims) seems to apply only to Hindu women when they marry. Muslim women instead seem to maintain a dual kind of *gusthi* membership, their father's and husband's respectively. The fact that Muslim women maintain residual inheritance rights in their father's properties lends consistency to the statement. See A. Chowdhury, "Family in Bangladesh," op. cit., 56.

18. R. B. Inden and R. W. Nicholas, *Kinship in Bengali Culture*, op. cit., 6.

shares a house called *a bari*, the paternal house, to be distinguished from *basha*, a place of residence different from one's own place of birth. This birth refers primarily to the birth of the family one descends from before referring to one's own personal birth proper.

However, it has to be noticed that to live together in a house does not necessarily depend on shared bodily relationships. In fact in a *bari* there may be people who are not related bodily and yet considered part and parcel of the *bari*. It seems that in Bengali culture a group of people living together constitute another solidary group brought together by sharing a house and not bodily substance. In short, one's family and one's household are not necessarily the same thing in Bengal. This may be important to avoid confusion when it comes to distinguishing a minimal from a maximal family on the ground. Since to share a body and to share a house do not always coincide, confusion arises when a son and his wife with their children for any reason do not reside in his father's *bari* but in some other *basha*. This might be interpreted as a sign of a family nucleation event. Instead, it is more than possible that for the Bengali concerned "as long as his father is alive, he and his family are considered to be part of his father's family, and the place where they reside is not their house (*bari*) but their nest (*basa*)."[19]

After the above quick description of the most important terminology and corresponding kin relationships it indicates, we must go back to the *gæti-kutum* which we have left in a sort of limbo above. While we have already improperly defined the two terms by assimilating them, by way of analogy, to our western "blood" and "legal" relationships in fact the definition does not cover the whole spectrum of what *gæti* and *kutum* relatives indicate. Indeed a set of *gæti* relatives includes all the blood relatives but at the same time it includes also, from a man's point of view, his wife and the wives of all his male *gæti*. Additionally, from a female's stand point the *gæti* class of relatives includes her husband and his *gæti* relatives, something which in the west would go under the in-laws rubric. If this is so, it appears that "blood and law do not define the categories of kinsmen in Bengali culture."[20] Instead it is the sharing of the same ancestral body that which characterises and distinguishes *gæti* relatives from any other. In practice *gæti* relatives include, beyond the eight fundamental relationships enshrined in the minimal family, the *sopindo*, i.e. the seven ascending males counting from ego and the *sokullo*, which we have already met in a generic sense and which here assumes instead a specialised meaning to indicate the people who share in the body of the eighth to the tenth ascending ancestor. *Somandok* are called those who share in the body of the eleventh to fourteenth ascending ancestor. Other remaining *gæti attio* beyond the fourteenth ascending ancestor are recognized and called *gotrojo*[21] only if they share the same residence in a village or locality.[22]

19. Ibid., 7.

20. Ibid., 12.

21. *Gotro*, it will be remembered, indicates commonality and sharing of a name, an ideal *adi purush* (original man or primordial ancestor) which, physically or ideally, is recognised as the originator of a *kul*.

22. See ibid., 8–15.

Similarly to the *gæti* class, the *kutum* kind of relatives, while they may be assimilated to the in-laws acquired through marriage, they do not quite correspond to them *in toto*. Besides, it also appears that there is a sort of overlapping between *gæti* and *kutum* so that some relatives may be classed both *gæti* and *kutum* at the same time. This is the case for instance for "mother's father, mother's brother, married sisters and married daughters." Similarly "a woman's husband's father, mother, brother and so forth"[23] are not considered *kutum* but *gæti*, which is quite the contrary of western usage. As with the *gæti* relatives who are not solely defined by blood relationships so the *kutum* ones are not solely determined by marriage. Apparently it is gift-giving which is the criterion which individualises this class of relatives. *Kutum* is synonymous with the term *sommondhi* which means "conjoined, bound together, tied" and it relates to the binding up of relationships through giving and receiving gifts (*adan-prodan*). Obviously, the gift involved here is that of a girl (*konna dan*). If sharing in a body is that which determines and distinguish*es* the *gæti* relatives, it is this time the gift of a body, the offer and acceptance of a woman's body in marriage which precipitates the *kutum* kind of relationships.

Things being so we cannot forget that either in sharing a body or in gifting it we are confronted with different kinds of codes of conduct, something which we find "naturally" embedded and inherent to any substance type. In other words, both body sharing and body gifting are related to a specific and different *dharma*.[24] Thus the *dharma* of *gæti* relatives enjoins them to sustain and nourish their shared body by sharing other non-bodily things and activities, among which of particular import are the living together and the sharing of food and of its source, wealth in general. Partaking of the same food nourishes the body of the living master of the *poribar*; *gæti*, however, have the duty to nourish their ancestral body through *pindo*s. It is the sum total of these activities (living together, eating and feeding, working and worshipping etc.) which is called *sonsar*. Significantly, this latter term is synonymous with *poribar* and is, more importantly, used to indicate the world and its regulated life processes. Indeed *poribar* is seen as the microcosm of the universe, its smaller homologous entity. It is to be noted that because they share the same body, *gæti* are entitled to live together and particularly, to eat together. Indeed, eating together is more important than living together, and respecting the code of conduct of their shared body accrues merit (*punno*), respect (*somman*), purity (*souc*), and wellbeing (*mongol*, *lokkhi*), "the collective and common properties of their shared bodily substance."[25]

The code of conduct of *kutum* relatives is obviously different. *Kutum* by definition belong to a different *kul* and as such are not enjoined to live together. Yet, they are sup-

23. Ibid., 16.

24. Importantly, substances are always coded, that is, they do not exist as neutral objects which are subsequently invested by religious, moral or political meanings. The behaviour of a substance (*dharma*) is that substance itself (*dharma* again), being and becoming coincide. See R. B. Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture*, op. cit., 18ff.

25. R. B. Inden and R. W. Nicholas, *Kinship in Bengali Culture*, op. cit., 18–9.

posed to sustain their *konna dan*, their *adan-prodan* type of relationship. This is done by frequent visits and exchanges of gifts. These latter, however, appear to be asymmetrical and further establish the *konna dankari* (the giver of a daughter) as the givers and their *jamai* (son in law) as the receiver. Cooked food, which in Bengali culture is absolutely important in that it discriminates in any sort of social interaction by creating or impeding the creation of solidary groups, is here exchanged lavishly. However, while among *gæti* the shared food is the nourishing, strong but unrefined and normal everyday cooked rice, when *kutum* relatives visit, a special, refined and richer food is served to them. Again food exchanged in this guise underlines its nature of gift unlike the food exchanged everyday by *gæti* which is not meant as a gift but as sustaining the life of their common body.

The codes of conduct or *dharma* inscribed in the body either shared or gifted of *gæti-kutum* importantly include also love as their intrinsic characteristic and the source of kin solidarity. Indeed love, meant as wellbeing and solidarity, is the code of conduct of *gæti-kutum*, something which originates from the substances it inheres in. In this respect it is interesting to notice how Bengali expressions substantialize, so to speak, love, as if it were a sort of bodily essence or fluid (*rosh*). Thus to say that one has love is to say that he is a "man of flesh and blood" (*rokto mansher manush*); to say that one is attracted to one's own he may speak of "the attraction of the blood" (*rokter tan*) or of "the same heart" (*eki ridoy*); brothers and sisters, again may speak of their reciprocal affection by referring to being born from "the same mother's belly" (*eki maer pete*) while they may refer to the love towards their mother as to the "attraction of the umbilical cord" (*narir tan*).[26]

Love, however, has a double valence. In as much as the body is built with hard (bones, nerves and marrow) and soft (flesh and blood) elements, love as well can be homologically characterised as either hard or soft, hierarchical or egalitarian. Depending on contexts and situations one or the other of the two kinds of love takes precedence. Birth is definitely the most important criterion discriminating among the kinds of love. In fact birth distinguishes people in two genera, the male and female. According to generation, birth discriminates also between he or she who gives birth and he or she who receives birth. Finally the temporal order of births constitutes another discriminative criterion. In short if it is true that kinship terms relate people by referring them to shared or gifted substances, at the same time, they "refer not only to kinship roles but to roles defined by sex, generation and age as well."[27] Noticeably, sex, generation and age are not properly distinguishing kin characteristics. In fact it turns out that the three criteria defined by birth apply also to people beyond the *attio-sojon* category.

For our purpose, it is important to realise that both hard/hierarchical love and its soft/egalitarian version are born out of birth. Thus egalitarian and easy love is expressed

26. Interestingly, friends have referred to me that the expression *narir tan*, beyond the meaning already mentioned above, is also used figuratively to highlight the love one has towards his or her country, a linkage that comes to be metaphorically assimilated to that of the umbilical cord of a mother.

27. Ibid., 71.

by the love and affection one finds among siblings of the same sex and of different sex as well. Again, egalitarian love is found also between husband and wife in their conjugal union. But it is a fact of everyday experience that what keeps a *poribar* together is not egalitarian easy and soft kind of love but its hierarchical and hard form.[28] Egalitarian love cannot but be subordinated to the hierarchical one apportioned according to generation, sex and age.

At this level we may speak of *sneho* (affection) as to the love of superiors (in generation, sex and age) towards their inferiors (in generation, sex and age) while we may speak of *bhokti* (devotion) as to the love of inferiors towards their superiors. Children should have *bhokti* towards their parents and wives should have it for their husbands. Accordingly, we may refer to the filial love of children towards their genitors as to an attitude of obedience and service; while we may conversely refer to parental love as to an agency of taking care of (*lalon-palon*) which specifically involves supporting (*bhoron*), protecting (*rokkha*) and nourishing (*poshon*) their children.[29] A dutiful husband should similarly behave towards his *bhokta* (devotee) wife.

If love is what characterises the *gæti-kutum* class of relatives as such it is also true that the two classes of people brought together by the compounded words enjoy a different kind of love. If a mix of egalitarian and hierarchical love is enjoined on *gæti* relatives, particularly within a *poribar*, with the hierarchical and hard love having the upper hand, the opposite is true for *kutum* relatives. *Kutum*s do not share the same body, are not concerned with its protection and nourishment, do not share the hard work of keeping the household afloat. Instead, their love is easy, egalitarian, amusing and gratifying. It is proverbial that children love to go to the *mamar bari* (one's mother's brother's house) seen as the place of amusement and games where good food is served and gifts are given.

If marriage is not the category *per se* capable to individualise completely the *kutum* class of relatives it is indeed, however, a very important act which has a lot to do with the body, its transformation and constitution. In Bengal marriage (*bibaho* or *bie*) is to be found in different formats according to region, caste belonging and wealth of the people engaged; however it appears safe to say that, at least the Hindu marriage, despite its many varieties and forms, respond*s* to the same symbolic framework.[30] *Bibaho* is one and perhaps the most important among a number of ritual actions called *sonskar* (sacraments)[31] devised to refine, as it were, the bodies of individuals and bring them to maturity. First

28. See ibid., 30–1.

29. See ibid., 28.

30. For an exhaustive treatment of Hindu marriage see R. W. Nicholas, "The Effectiveness of the Hindu Sacrament (*Samskara*): Caste, Marriage, and Divorce in Bengali Culture." In L. Harlan and P. B. Courtright, eds, *From the Margin of Hindu Marriage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 137–59.

31. Hindus themselves maintain a degree of disagreement and variations as to the when and how these *sonskar* are to be administered. Inden and Nicholas list a series of 10 of them. Undoubtedly among the most important are *bibaho* and *upanayana*. The former opens the door to the important householder stage of life, while the latter, only for males, introduces one to the stud*y* of the Vedas. See ibid., 35–9.

of all, marriage is caste endogamous but *kul* and *gotro* exogamous.[32] In a meaningful way marriage "re-enacts or re-establishes at the level of the clan a shared body relationship that already exists at the caste level."[33] A marriage performed between people of different *jati* or caste would not be proper and would entail disruption in the hierarchy of coded-substances (*dharma*). What marriage accomplishes is the transformation of the woman's body into the half body of her husband. This is possible only if the body to be transformed already shares in the body of the husband in that they both belong to the same *jati*.[34]

From this scanty presentation of what the Hindu marriage is a number of important consequences, particularly as far as wives and their status are concerned, ensue. In as much as a woman is transformed into the half body of her husband, she is on a par with him, so that among the two a sort of egalitarian love does exist. However, its expression is basically forbidden in public, particularly, in front of their elders, *shoshur* and *shashuri* (father and mother in law respectively) *in primis*. A wife may have an easy going relationship only with her husband's younger siblings, *debor* (husband's brother) and *nonud* (husband's sister). But once again the manifestation of this easy kind of love must be suspended in the presence of elders. In front of them a good Bengali wife would lower her eyes and cover her head with an extremity of her sari (*ghomta*). Indeed the fact that a woman's body through marriage is assimilated to her husband's, confines her to a subservient position.

Egalitarian love nearly disappears in the political economy of the *poribar* where hierarchical considerations dominate normal familial interactions. This is all the more true if we consider that normally and traditionally a wife is considerably younger than her husband. Younger age farther increases the gap and the distance between husband and wife. Thus while a husband may call out his wife by name, this is forbidden to a wife who will always refer to him as the father of his children. As already mentioned, *bhokti*, as if of a devotee towards his or her god, is the right attitude of a wife towards her husband. Indeed the comparison is not preposterous. It is written in the *dharmasastra* of Manu that *poti duscoritro, kamuk ba gunohin holeo tini saddhi stri kortrik sorboda debotar nee shebbo*.[35]

Interestingly the subordination of husband and wife's egalitarian love to a hierarchical one is expressed by the separation and the prohibition of sexual intercourse during the first and second night of the marriage, during which both the bride and the groom are supposed to stay with the women and men of the family respectively. "The separation of

32. Apparently also Muslim status group practice endogamy. See A. Chowdhury, "Family in Bangladesh," op. cit., 66.

33. R. B. Inden and R. W. Nicholas, *Kinship in Bengali Culture*, op. cit., 40.

34. According to Inden's fascinating analysis a *jati* (caste) is individualised by a shared body, a shared territory, a shared occupation and a shared worship code. See R. B. Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture*, op. cit., 16 *passim*.

35. S. Bondopaddhoy tr., *Monusongita* (Kolkata: Anondo Publications, 2002), 162. "A husband although of bad character, libidinous and void of any virtue should be served like a god by a holy wife" (*Manu* 5,154). My translation.

the husband and wife on this night is an efficacious symbol of the subordination of their egalitarian, conjugal love for one another to the parental and filial love that unites the family."[36] Significantly a traditional marriage in Bengal reflects always the interests of the families involved more than the direct interests or love of the prospective spouses.[37]

To conclude this brief cultural review of what the Bengali kinship system is all about, we cannot but go back to our starting point. The *gæti-kutum*, we have seen, are a particular kind of *attio-sojon* whose particular defining characteristic is that of sharing and gifting a body respectively. Yet, *attio-sojon* is a wider and open-ended category whose individualising criterion is that of exchanging and sharing other than bodily substances. It is this activity of sharing and giving non-bodily substances which creates what anthropologists call fictitious kinship relationships. Indeed there is little of fictitious in this, since because sharing and gift giving are the fundamental criteria of kinship relationships, so called fictitious ones are as real as the ones based on bodily sharing and exchanges. A discussion on kinship in Bengal which would exclude such so called fictitious relationships would be incomplete at the least. In this category of *attio-sojon* enter all the people who in one way or another, because of their job, residence etc. have dealings with a household, becoming, because of this, incorporated in it as the *amader lok* (our people).

But more importantly all the neighbours residing in the same *para* (a hamlet) or *gram* (village), generally irrespective of religion or caste,[38] are *attio-sojon*, sharing in this case the substance-territory. Thus Bengalis distinguish a *para somporke bhai* (a brother related by hamlet), a *para somporke kaka* (a paternal uncle related by hamlet) and so on and so forth. Again they may speak of a *dhormo bon* (a sister by behaviour) or, less commonly, of a *patano bon* (a sister by consent). Interestingly in these last couple of examples a relationship is established with a woman by assuming a code of conduct (*dharma*) inherent to a particular kin relationship independently of her bodily substance. Be that as it may, these fictitious kin relationships assume great importance because they constitute kinds of social networks crisscrossing a person's social life, like kinds of safety nets.

THE TRADITIONAL BENGALI KINSHIP SYSTEM AS RELATED TO ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES

The kinship system I have attempted to describe in the previous section was intrinsically linked to the *jati-varna* template of which it represented both a cause and an effect. The latter developed in its modern form from the beginning of the Christian era assuming a dominant political position during the reign of the Pala kings of Bengal (750–1152 AD).

36. R. B. Inden and R. W. Nicholas, *Kinship in Bengali Culture*, op. cit., 50.

37. See E. Rahim, "The Society and its Environment." In J. Heitzman and R. L. Worden, eds, *Bangladesh: a Country Study* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1989), 62.

38. However it is to be noticed that people belonging to very low *jati* or to untouchable groupings were with difficulty considered human beings at all, let alone relatives. Usually these groups lived outside the inhabited area of villages, in areas which, like swamps and river sides, fostered geographical segregation.

Indeed, the *varna* system, from early medieval times onwards, became the way in which lordship and mastery were articulated and distributed in Bengal, the political framework which was itself the then state.

> The latter did not exist as a separate and secular institution within the social formations of the time but was itself 'the total system of social relations' organized around a cosmological and theological framework. It was in fact because of *dharma* that a king was a king; but it was also because of the king that *dharma* could itself exist as the cosmo-moral order. From here it followed that just as it was *varnadharma* which articulated the notion of lordship in early medieval India, so the notion of lordship also articulated the *varna* template. The agrarian relations of production were… both the practical translation and the heart of such a system. The hierarchical chain of landlords, landowners and peasantry was the cause and the effect of 'a state system' which we may well call kingdom.[39]

It is significant in this context that the agrarian relations *jati-varna* enforced from early medieval times on were structured by dominant rulers over dominated peasants. In this system of exploitation, if coercion was important so was also the peasantry's consensus to it. "This was possible because domination was disguised in the form of service. The protection a lord afforded to his people and land was what the dominated exchanged for his labour."[40]

The intimate link between caste, political power and agrarian relations the above short discussion postulates is a premise to the following brief analysis of a particular kind of Bengali literature, variously called *Kulaji* (lineages rank), *Kula-karika* (commentary on lineages), *Kula-panjika* (lineages chronicle) or simply *Kulagrantha* (book of lineages). This will farther highlight the link between *varna* ranking and kinship and the necessary political framework these require.

This literature appears to collect materials dating from the fifteenth century, yet the manuscripts which have preserved their content are not older than the late eighteenth century.[41] *Kulagranthas*, as the word would infer, are basically the genealogical records (*bonshaboli*) of the highest castes of Bengal, the Brahmans, the Kayasthas and the Baidya. If the word *kul*, we know, is generally employed to mean lineage or clan, in the *kula-granthas* the word comes, however, to assume a specialised, all Bengali meaning, that is, *kul* here came to denote status, a sort of elite position within the *varna-jati* pattern. "A

39. S. Targa, *The Pala Kingdom: Rethinking Lordship in Early Medieval North Eastern India* (Unpublished Mphil Dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1999), 110. The *varna* system, preordained and established who could do what. In particular, it established distinct ownership rights for each and every caste, as their natural and intrinsic entitlement. The whole of chapter 3 is relevant to the discussion being tabled here.

40. Ibid., 108.

41. See R. B. Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture*, op. cit., 4.

person possessing this elite status was described as a *kulin*, literally, one who belonged to a high status *kula*."[42] And why this new meaning became necessary will become clear below.

Typically a *kulagrantha* is divided in three sections. The first narrates the story of creation of the *kul* at hand. The second would deal with the proper actions (*kormo*) and code of conduct (*dharma*) of that *kul*, and the third one would deal instead with the truth of births and marriages of the *kul*.[43] Basically this literature was devised with the precise scope to evaluate, discipline and control marriage practices in order to preserve *jati* status and *kulin* ranking.[44] Chatterjee writes:

> The basic concerns, as represented by the *kulajis* seem to have been as follows: preventing contact with people and groups deemed to be impure, that is, a *jati*/*kula* of lower rank and status, and specific groups deemed to stand beyond the pale of the *varnashrama* configuration; condemning marriage practices and social interaction with specific lineages and/or *jatis* deemed to have violated the norms of social interaction mandated for them; and condemning and regulating generally unacceptable, antisocial behaviour such as committing a murder.[45]

Indeed the *kulagranthas* immediate scopes were to preserve and uphold a Brahmanical socio-cultural order, which had in the *varna* template its most accomplished feature. Apparently this was deemed necessary because of a particular situation Bengal found itself in at least from the thirteenth century on.[46] After the demise of the Sena kings and the progressive inroads of Muslims in Bengal from 1206 AD, Bengal was deprived of a paramount Hindu king who could articulate and enforce *varnadharma*. This is important: as briefly mentioned above, the caste system which was the structure of the early medieval Bengal state, could not exist without a king enforcing and articulating its cosmo-moral order. Caste ranking was itself directly linked to land ownership so that disruption in caste ranking would mean disruption on the ground of land ownership and agrarian relations in general. In other words, the coming of the Muslims could theoretically collapse not only the ritual system sustaining the *varna* arrangements, but, and worse still, it could provoke the loss of ownership rights in land of the hitherto landed elite. Material power and status based power existed in tandem, one reinforcing and reaffirming the other.[47] Practically the *kulagranthas* helped to extend Brahmanical culture in Bengal giv-

42. K. Chatterjee, "Communities, Kings and Chronicles: The Kulagranthas of Bengal," *Studies in History*, 2005, 21/2: 175.

43. R. B. Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture*, op. cit., 3.

44. K. Chatterjee, "Communities, Kings and Chronicles: The Kulagranthas of Bengal," op. cit., 199.

45. Ibid., 180.

46. I am tentative here because some authors believe that the *kulagranthas* actually incorporate even older material than that mentioned here, something which might go back to the Pala Buddhist period. If this is so, *kulagranthas* represent a defence of Brahmanical culture not only against Muslims but, before that, also against Buddhists. See ibid., 9ff.

47. Ibid., 195.

ing it a hegemonic status. This was achieved by introducing a number of strategic new practices.

The first was to stress correct marriage practices as the source of correct ranking. In a context of social confusion and hence of caste miscegenation brought about by the Muslim politico-military conquest,[48] *kulagrantas* with their genealogies tried to re-establish caste order and correct power relations on the ground. The stress on correct marriages, in time, brought women to bear the responsibility for their own *kul* and *jati* pristine ranking. This is paradoxical if we think that *kulagranthas* are highly patriarchal texts where women are noticeable only for their virtual absence. Yet, the *somman* (honour) and *kulin* status of women's respective *jati* came to depend mostly on their purity and correct behaviour.[49] The lack of a paramount Hindu overlord caused by the Muslim inroad forced castes and sub-castes to find a different enforcer that could somehow work in his stead. This was found in the *somaj* (society), the second strategy *kulagrantas* put in place to counteract the new political situation. "The *samaj* referred to in the *kulaji* literature represented a collectivity of people who were biologically related to one another through *jati* connections. It was, thus, a large kinship network brought into existence by and perpetuated through intermarriage."[50] Obviously it was not the case that the *somaj* replaced *in toto* the monarchical functions. However it is true that the *somaj* now worked in tandem with local potentates and *jomidar* (substantial landlords). Indeed "the maintenance of Brahmanical principles, particularly in its application to social order and social status, was enabled, according to the discourse of the *kulajis*, by the collaboration among three important entities: the king, the *kulacharya* and the community or *samaj*."[51] These three institutions[52] eventually helped to ferry Brahmanism through difficult times allowing it a continuous political clout which *per se* translated in a continuous and deeper hold on agricultural land. This was possible because of the inextricable and essential links between caste and kinship networks which *kulagrantha* literature is the proof of.

Closer to our time, but originating from the cultural and historical premises described above, it appears clear to me that the kinship system of Bengal was and still is functional to a system of agrarian relations which has patron-client sort of interactions as its main organising tools. Undoubtedly, Bengal's kinship system, apart from small tribal enclaves, relies on a patriarchal organization which is founded on patrilineal descent and patrilocal residence.[53] "A child is born out of a male line and is introduced to the world by the

48. It was this situation of caste confusion or miscegenation, real or just perceived, which created the necessity of *kulinism*, that is, the formulation of principles for a new caste ranking, above and beyond normal caste hierarchy.

49. Ibid., 180–81.

50. Ibid., 201.

51. Ibid., 199.

52. The *kulacharya* is the expert on lineages. It is also called *ghotok* which term nowadays has a somewhat restricted meaning of matchmaker.

53. See M. T. Cain, "The Household Life Cycle and Economic Mobility in Rural Bangladesh," *Population and Development Review*, 1978, 1/3: 422.

father."[54] This alone is enough to explain the discrimination between the sexes at the expense of the female element within the *poribar*. Upon marriage a daughter leaves her father's house and goes to live in her husband's. This warrants the son preference of most Bengalis when it comes to children: sons are an asset while daughters are a liability, no need to invest on them who eventually will leave their paternal house to enrich the house of another. In this respect Bengali parents universally share the belief that sons are a sort of insurance for their old age, and in this sense they are considered an asset.

Still more, because Bengali families are patrilineal, daughters are not supposed to inherit their fathers' property, be it land or otherwise. Of course this is slightly different for Muslim women, who, as we know, maintain a sort of double membership in both their father and husband's *gosthi*. While they thus maintain hereditary rights on their fathers' possessions, they usually do not claim them, leaving the family property in their male siblings' hands and in so doing guaranteeing themselves a welcoming place in their brothers' houses in times of difficulty.[55]

The subordination of women to men in a patriarchal family and society is necessary to maintain in existence an unequal or hierarchical society in which solely patron-client relationships may exist. Patronage may be defined as "a pattern of relationships in which members of hierarchically arranged groups possess mutually recognized, not explicitly stipulated rights and obligations involving mutual aid and preferential treatment. The bond between patron and client is personal, and is contracted and continued by mutual agreement for an indeterminate time."[56]

Patronage in other words is an asymmetrical relationship linking unequal people be they the members of a *poribar* or the segments of a society: castes, clans or status groups as they may be. Patronage is that which creates systematic unity in an otherwise fragmented and separated whole. In this context it is of the utmost importance to notice that the control and policing of women's body is what maintains in existence social and familial hierarchies. This control in Bengal was traditionally exerted through early arranged marriages of girls, at the onset of puberty, and with much older grooms and by the imposition of *porda*, a system of rules of seclusion which severely restricted and restrict women's movements and interactions outside of their households. This traditional kinship system required in other words a rigid division of gender roles which saw in the male the breadwinner and in the female the family manager, the wife and the mother essentially.

54. L. Fruzzetti, A. Ostor, S. Barnett, "The Cultural Construction of the Person in Bengal and Tamil Nadu," op. cit., 169.

55. Chowdhuri quoting Arefeen mentions that it was the Hindu law of inheritance *(daya bhag)* which influenced Muslim women's behaviour here, adding, however, that the latter usually renounce the share of their father's property because they prefer to keep it with their brothers "as an insurance against troubles." A. Chowdhury, "Family in Bangladesh," op. cit., 67.

56. J. Breman quoted in D. Lewis and A. Hossain, *Understanding the Local Power Structure in Rural Bangladesh* (Stockholm: Edita Communication, 2008), 24, footnote 5.

Significantly the task of controlling women was primarily nested with the male members of a family: the father, the husband and the son, according to the stage of life in which the woman concerned was in.[57] However, beyond one's restricted family there existed and still exists, even though somehow curtailed in its prerogatives, what we have already met and called *somaj*. The *somaj* in the *kulagrantha* was the group of elders representing a caste. This is still the case today even though considering that the Bangladeshi Hindu population has been reduced to an exiguity it is obvious that this social institution has assumed a different configuration beside and beyond the traditional one. Nowadays the *somaj* is "the traditional association of the people of the same status and same kin-group having a fixed territory within a village community."[58]

If so defined, it appears obvious, that within a village a number of *somaj* may and do actually exist. A village may thus have a Hindu or a Muslim *somaj*; it may have within the Hindu and Muslim *somaj* respectively its own sub sort of *somaj* catering for caste, kin and status groups. Generally speaking, the *somaj* exerts social control on its members being entrusted with the capacity to award punishments for anti-social activities and behaviour, something which explicitly may go or is perceived to go against traditional religio-cultural values and practices. The *shalish* or village arbitration is the means the *somaj* uses to right wrongs. According to the level of problems encountered one or the other layer of *somaj* may be called for. A family problem may be dealt with by the *somaj* of one's *gosthi*; a problem related to an internal religious question may be sorted out calling the *somaj* of the religious group involved while a problem relating to the whole village may require the convocation of all the *somaj* of that village. The *somaj* however has also positive and constructive socio-cultural functions. "Traditionally, a *somaj* used to perform a variety of functions such as the approval of marriage negotiations, conducting the marriage ceremony including the invitation and cooking arrangements, serving food to the guests, etc. and organizing some of the social and religious festivals."[59] The *somaj* however remains an informal institution whose membership remains volatile. Influential and well-to-do people are usually its required members. While often feared, the *somaj* is also known for its partiality and injustices. Women have often been disciplined through these informal instruments of social control.

Indeed the control of women meant the control on marital alliances and of the power relations they articulated. Marriages, as we have already seen, contributed to maintain elites' purity and rank which in turn had a practical manifestation in land-holding patterns. A society of unequals could not but provide unequal tenancy rights which people

57. In this respect it is interesting to notice what Manu, the author of the homonymous *dharmasastra*, wrote: *Ballokale pitar, joubone potir, o potimrito hole putroder odhine strilok thakben; strilok shadhinbhabe thakben na*. My translation: "A woman in childhood is under her father, in youth under her husband and in case he dies, she will be under her sons; a woman cannot remain independent." Sureshchondro Bondopaddhoy tr., *Monusongita* op. cit., (5,148), 162.

58. A. Chowdhury, "Family in Bangladesh," op. cit., 56.

59. Ibid., 57.

were then made to digest using patron-client relationships, through which the landowner would somehow compensate peasants' loyalty with his tangible protection, dressed not in justice but disguised as grace. Importantly and in parallel to what is already said above of the relationship between a king and his kingdom, this relation of exploitation became possible because cunningly the king, the landlord, the father disguised their power as service, that is, the functions of protection, fostering and nourishing were used to enforce power relations in the kingdom, the landed estate, the family. Perceptively, Sangari commented that patriarchies are founded on a fundamental inconsistency: while they promise protection they actually offer injury.[60]

Being careful not to project modern considerations onto older times and situations, I must admit that the caste-kinship conundrum was one response to a socio-economic and political situation which had land ownership and only that as the sole determinant of rural power. Indeed, patron-client relationships worked also as a form of wealth redistribution which in those days somehow redressed the political imbalance of unequal agrarian relations.

In this respect Bodes and Howes wisely remark that "moral values, rooted in religion and kin-based social institutions, have served to partially constrain the rich; obliging them to engage in redistributive activities and to provide minimal safety nets if they wish to command respect and secure sustained political support."[61] Obviously, a system of patronage could at best distribute wealth but not increase or produce it, and this in a country which has gone through a rapid demographic increase, actually must have spelt disaster. The following table graphically shows the kind of rapid demographic changes Bangladesh has gone through in a century.

BANGLADESH POPULATION[62]

Year of Census	Population Census (in thousands)	Adjusted Population (in thousands)
1901	28,928	–
1911	31,555	–
1921	33,255	–
1931	35,602	–
1941	41,997	–
1951	41,932	–

60. See K. Sangari, "Violent Acts: Cultures, Structures and Retraditionalisation." In B. Ray ed., *Women of India: Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods* (New Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilizations, 2005), 170.

61. In D. Lewis and A. Hossain, *Understanding the Local Power Structure in Rural Bangladesh*, op. cit., 72.

62. Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Bureau of Statistics, *Population and Housing Census 2011*. Preliminary Results, July 2011, 3–4, at <http://catalog.ihsn.org/index.php/catalog/4376/download/56815>.

1961	50,840	–
1974	71,479	76,398
1981	87,120	89,912
1991	106,315	111,455
2001	124,355	130,523
2011	142,319	152,518

It is indeed difficult to know how the social system described so far actually worked in practice and if it was able to guarantee a minimum of social security, as it were. We can however surmise that the extraordinary demographic changes which occurred in the last century might have engulfed the system because, as in a game of domino, demographic explosion brings about fragmentation of land ownership and, eventually, a situation of landlessness for many.[63]

In this respect it is to be noticed that, many ethnographic studies carried out in the last few decades agree in saying that the most common kind of household to be found in rural Bangladesh is no longer the maximal, extended family but the minimal, nuclear one.[64] Obviously, this does not say much about the collapse of the system as envisaged above. In fact, I would not generalise too much from that finding. Firstly, because household partition can be both a cause and a result of poverty; secondly, because as Inden and Nicholas have already reminded us, household partition does not necessarily mean nucleation of family: recently divided families might actually go on functioning as single economic and social units, and this seems often to be the case.[65]

Be that as it may, Barkat-e-Khuda reports that 36% of households highlighted economic pressure as one of the reasons which precipitated familial separation without however explaining if this meant lack of resources or just their unequal distribution among the members of the household. Again, in the same research it is mentioned that another important reason to separate had been strong discord and animosity among the females (26%) and males (10%) of the household. Similarly here the reasons for such discord, which however has been reported by other anthropologists as well,[66] have not been investigated. Finally, the death of the patriarch was reported as the reason why a substan-

63. The 2008 Agriculture Census reports that out of a total of 28,670,000 households in the country 4,480,000 (i.e. 15,62%) are absolutely landless. See Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, "The 2008 Agriculture Census," at <http://203.112.218.66/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/AgricultureCensus/ag_pre_08.pdf?page=/PageReportLists.aspx?PARENTKEY=44>. However it is estimated that nearly two thirds of Bangladeshi are virtually landless. See "Who owns Bangladesh?" In *The Economist*, 20 August 2013. At <http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2013/08/women-and-property-rights>.

64. See references in A. Chowdhury, "Family in Bangladesh," op. cit., 59. There is not always agreement among anthropologist on how to define the Bengali family. An interesting attempt at categorisation can be found in L. Edlund and A. Rahman, "Household Structure and Child Outcomes: Nuclear vs. Extended Families-Evidence from Bangladesh," Colombia University, 5 February 2005, 1–39.

65. A. D. Foster, "Household Partition in Rural Bangladesh," *Population Studies*, 1993, 47/1: 97–8.

66. See for instance A. Chowdhury, "Family in Bangladesh," op. cit., 68.

tial proportion of households had broken up.[67] Indeed, in a country like Bangladesh it is extremely difficult to understand the demographic evolution of a household as linked to its economic fortunes.

In the 70s, for instance, Cain appears to link the duration of a household to the substantial quantity of land owned by it. He explains that "ownership of family land provides a father leverage over his sons, which gives him a degree of control over the timing of the sons' departure from his household… A landless father does not have this leverage."[68] Conversely, the same author would also link the tendency of poor households to have more children as to a "rational and necessary" survival strategy on their part. In a situation where formal and informal social welfare props are virtually absent, where natural calamities intermittently cause havoc, where mortality and morbidity rates are high, the risks of economic decline are offset by maximising fertility: greater fertility brings about a greater number of male births and consequently a greater number of surviving sons able to enter the household's production cycle.[69] Even Cain then identifies the death of a patriarch as the crucial moment in which a household cycle ends.

At this point a first conclusion may be reached. Remarkably a kinship system, which I have untiringly stated to be born out of strict relationships with land ownership patterns and "feudal" agrarian relations, in an unprecedented demographic situation like that represented by the twentieth century not only did not collapse but it actually managed to adjust itself to the new socio-economic environment. Among these adjustments an important one has to do with the differences in the timing in which sons leave the household. "While this departure often happens some time after a son has started a family, there is little evidence of extended joint residence of brothers or other similar arrangements after the death of their father."[70] Significantly, however, when sons leave their father's house they either migrate or set up their residence nearby. Separation in this sense is meant to offset animosity possibly because of inequality in resource distribution while continuing to enjoy the benefits of living together, as it were.

So far I have been discussing the family and its socio-economic linkages and transformations in a contest which has implicitly postulated land cultivation, if not the only, at least as the main productive activity. This is possibly the reason why despite the demographic explosion and the loss of land ownership, the Bengali kinship system has essentially survived unscathed:[71] the system, in fact, was born to maintain and enforce unequal and hierarchical social relations, something which both the loss in land ownership and the demographic explosion not only maintained but also increased, by increasing the level of exploitation of the landed aristocracy over a landless peasantry. It is thus urgent

67. Ibid., 99.

68. M. T. Cain, "The Household Life Cycle and Economic Mobility in Rural Bangladesh," op. cit., 435.

69. Ibid., 430, 434, 437, passim.

70. A. D. Foster, "Household Partition in Rural Bangladesh," op. cit., 114.

71. For similar findings see A. S., *Family Structure and Change in Rural Bangladesh* (New York: New York, Population Council, 1996), 1–39.

to see now if, in a changed socio-economic environment, like the present contemporary one, where agriculture is no longer the lone productive activity of Bangladesh how the Bengali kinship pattern has evolved or has been affected.

FROM COOPERATION TO COMPETITION: BENGALI KINSHIP AND MODERN SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS

We may conventionally fix the beginning of this new phase of macro changes to the restoration of parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh in December 1990 when, in the face of a strong opposition movement, the last military president, Hussain Muhammad Ershad, was toppled from power.[72]

It is this new political scenario, I believe, which has enabled great and irreversible socio-economic transformations in the country. The latter have actually been signalled by a new demographic scenario. This appears clearly in the following table.

BANGLADESH POPULATION VITAL STATISTICS[73]

	1974	1981	1991	2001	2011
Population Size (000)	71,479	87,120	106,315	124,355	142,319
Population Change (000)	–	15,641	19,195	18,040	17,964
Population Increase %	–	21.9	22	17	14.4
Average Annual Increase (000)	–	1,931	1,920	1,804	1,772
Average Annual Growth Rate %	–	2.32	2.01	1.58	1.34

Undoubtedly, the downward demographic trend starts earlier even though it receives a considerable boost only in the decade 1991–2001. Indeed the tendency, although clear in its decreasing direction, results also as very slow: it took Bangladesh 30 years to decrease its population growth rate of one percentage point from 2.32 in 1981 to 1.34 in 2011. This is also a measure of the slow pace of socio economic changes affecting the country. Cain in the seventies had clearly linked the rationality of fertility maximization with attempts to offset higher economic risks.[74] Conversely this means that reduction of economic risks would bring about a consequent reduction of population growth.

72. Possibly, the fall of Ershad became more meaningful because it basically happened at a time when internationally the demise of the Soviet Union, December 1991, was forcing a rethinking at all levels of policies which had been unchanged since the Second World War.

73. See Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Bureau of Statistics, *Population and Housing Census 2011. Preliminary Results*, op. cit., 4.

74. M. T. Cain, "The Household Life Cycle and Economic Mobility in Rural Bangladesh," op. cit., 437.

Indeed the reduction in population growth has been achieved by reducing fertility by increasing age at first birth and thus consequently reducing the size of households. According to UN statistics, Bangladeshi women in the period 1970–75 had on average 6.4 live children per head. This figure, however, in the period 1995–2000 was nearly halved at 3.8.[75] Similarly though conversely, if the average age of females at marriage in the 70s was of 16.3, in the 90s this was considerably raised to 18.1.[76] The increasing age at marriage went hand in hand with the increased number of girls in the 20–24 age period who had never married. In the 70s this indicator was 4.6%, in the 90s it was 12.4% and in the last decade of the last century this amounted to 18.5%, an increase of 14% over a period of 30 years.[77] As a result in 2000, women who were in the age period 45–49 had their first child on average when they were 16.9 years old, while women in their early twenties had their first child when they were 18.6 years old.[78] It must also be considered that generally speaking a lower fertility rate is necessarily correlated to a decreased infant mortality. This appears to be the case for Bangladesh too. In the 1970–75 period out of 1000 live births 150 would die. By 1995–2000 this rate was however considerably reduced to nearly half at 79.[79] A further and quicker drop in infant mortality rate was registered then in 2012 when out of 1000 live birth only 33 were destined to die.[80] With such significant demographic indicators, it appears only obvious that over the last few decades also the overall membership of households has declined. Bangladesh has transited from an average household membership of 5.7 people in the 80s, to 5.2 in the 90s,[81] ending up in 2012 with an average membership of 4.5 people per household.[82] Allowing for the fact that today's families due to a diversified job market, tend to be dispersed so that it is difficult to capture the true meaning and consistency of surveys, it appears however that Bangladesh like other South Asian countries is in the middle of a demographic transition which favours so called nuclear families as against, joint or extended ones.

75. See I. De Silva, *Demographic and Social Trends Affecting Families in the South and Central Asian Region* (UN Publications, 2003), table no. 2, at <http://undesadspd.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=yihqraoAMVw%3d&tabid=282>. Government figures would give a fertility rate of 2.12 for the year 2012. See Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Bureau of Statistics, *Key Indicators on Report of Sample Vital Registration System, 2008–2012*, xvii, at <http://www.bbs.gov.bd/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/Keyfinding/Key_Indi_SVR_Eng_2012.pdf>.

76. See I. De Silva, *Demographic and Social Trends Affecting Families in the South and Central Asian Region*, op. cit., table 4. This data is here given as I found it. However, my field experience tells me that it might be quite exaggerated. Nowadays, I have not found a married couple who actually admitted to be younger than 18. If this were to be true, in Bangladesh we would be missing adolescent girls below 18!

77. Ibid., table 3.

78. Ibid., table 5.

79. Ibid., table 6.

80. See Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Bureau of Statistics, *Key Indicators on Report of Sample Vital Registration System, 2008–2012*, op. cit., xviii.

81. I. De Silva, *Demographic and Social Trends Affecting Families in the South and Central Asian Region*, op. cit., table 7.

82. See Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Bureau of Statistics, *Key Indicators on Report of Sample Vital Registration System, 2008–2012*, op. cit., xv.

All the demographic changes described above have been both the cause and the effect of socio-economic changes which have their principal root, I believe, in the phenomenon of globalization. The latter is simply the constant mobility or flow of "capital, people, commodities, images and ideologies through which the spaces of the globe are becoming increasingly intertwined."[83] A process which speaks of connectedness and relationships, globalization has been facilitated by tremendous technological advances in transportations and, particularly, in telecommunications. This latter in Bangladesh has had a fantastic boost from the last years of the last century with the introduction of Grameenphone, the first and now the biggest cell phone operator and provider in the country.[84]

It is difficult and perhaps too early to be able to quantify and qualify the changes and transformations brought about by all this, however, for our purpose it is important to notice that globalization buffered by political openness, both within the country and internationally, has helped a lot at least in two economic fields. The economic liberalization which took place after the demise of the Soviet Union reached and interested also Bangladesh opening up new economic venues in the job market and consequently diversifying an economy hitherto concentrated basically and solely on agriculture. Secondly, the newly found interconnectedness of the world now discovered as a global village, created scope for thousands of Bangladeshi people to migrate in search of economic fortune abroad.

The first outcome of globalization, what we may call global commercialization, while creating new markets particularly in developing countries, caused Bangladesh and its traditional social institutions to modernize, as it were, or so it appears. In this sense modernization meant that in the new job market the traditional gender role division had to be overcome. Because of the garment industry, for instance, millions of Bangladeshi women had to come out of their traditionally assigned roles of household managers and instead assume productive ones, hitherto the domain of their male counterparts. If this has been a trend shared by all South Asian countries, Bangladesh has been specifically singled out. In 2010 the female share of employment in agriculture, in industry and in the services was respectively of 40.48%, 22.53% and 18.56%.[85] Significantly for the year 2012 a total rate of employment was given at 81% for males and 54% for females.[86] If before the globalization of markets Bangladeshi people had to offset poverty maintaining hierarchical and

83. J. X. Inda and R. Rosaldo, eds, *The Anthropology of Globalization: Reader* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 4.

84. Grameenphone, a joint venture of Telenor Norway and Grameen Telecom Corporation, started its operations on 27 March 1997.

85. ILO, *Bangladesh: Employment and Labour Market*, *Statistics*, 2015), at <http://www.ilo.org/gateway/faces/home/polareas/empandlab?locale=en&countryCode=BGD&track=STAT&policyId=2&_adf.ctrl-state=1a3ef69tpe_4>.

86. Danish Trade Union Council for International Development Cooperation, *Bangladesh Labour Market Profile 2014*, at <http://www.ulandssekretariatet.dk/sites/default/files/uploads/public/PDF/LMP/lmp_bangladesh_2014_final_version.pdf>. These rates have been elaborated considering both males and females above 15 years of age.

patron-client relationships only to guarantee mere survival, now landlessness and lack of sufficient income could be offset by taking up employment in the manufacturing sector, which in Bangladesh coincides with the garment industry.[87] Not only, it was now the turn of women to take up employment and so try to supplement their family income. This was made possible because the economy had eventually diversified. In 2012 manufacturing contributed to 17% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the construction business to 8.3%, trade, restaurants and hotels to 14.2%, transport and communication to 11.1% and agriculture to 17.1%.[88] Notably, agriculture while diminishing its share of GDP as compared to that of ten years earlier when it stood at 22%, in 2012 was however still employing 48% of the total work force of the country. In 2010, agriculture remained the main venue for 40.84% of the female work force. Outside of the agricultural sector women found employment in the readymade garments industry where 80% of its workers are females.[89]

The diversification of the economy, an enlarged job market and a persistent impossibility of the agricultural sector to provide full employment to Bangladesh' teeming millions, together with the globalization consumerist driven dream spread everywhere by modern media, have caused a constant and growing emigrational flow, from the rural areas of the country to the urban settlements, particularly Dhaka, the capital city. So the urban population of Bangladesh in 1980 was calculated to be around 11.3 million.[90] After 32 years, in 2012 this population has risen to 41,1 million.[91] On the other hand, the flux of internal migration has also seen a rural to rural direction as well. In a still predominantly agriculturist country like Bangladesh, people do move towards new land hitherto not brought under cultivation. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, in 2012 a rate of 21.6 people out of 1000 migrated to rural places. This however is a considerably lower rate if compared to the people who moved to the cities from the countryside, i.e. 69.7 every 1000 people.[92]

This internal emigrational flow, particularly that towards the cities, is of particular interest to our argument because it seems to considerably affect the family and its structure. As a matter of fact for women immigrating to the cities the chances of breaking away from traditionally confined roles seem to increase. A woman coming to the city first and foremost gets away from her in-laws, with the chance at the same time to evade hierarchical roles commanded by tradition and to be free to develop a more intimate relationship founded this time on what above we have called conjugal, egalitarian love. The detachment from in-laws is also the detachment from an extended or maximal family towards

87. Ibid., 13.

88. Ivi.

89. Ibid., 15.

90. See I. De Silva, *Demographic and Social Trends Affecting Families in the South and Central Asian Region*, op. cit., table 17.

91. See Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Bureau of Statistics, *Key Indicators on Report of Sample Vital Registration System, 2008–2012*, op. cit., xv.

92. Ibid., xix.

a more nuclear or minimal one. Urban congestion and housing pattern seem to stabilise and favour the nucleation of the family, discouraging larger households.[93] But women coming to the cities also experience a change in their familial role. If back in the village they were charged with unpaid family work, they now become active wage earners. In theory this increases their weight in the family and should give them a share in decision making. Possibly the higher a woman's share in a family's income the greater her decision making power.

As already mentioned above a second major economic novelty, as it were, brought about by an increasing economic interconnectedness and rampant poverty at home has convinced many in Bangladesh to choose the way of overseas employment. A trend which started in the 70s, it has increasingly grown in the following decades. "More than 8 million migrant workers have left the country since official records on labour migration started in 1976,"[94] when the number of overseas migrants stood at 6,000. The Government of Bangladesh estimates that the country has an out-migration flow of something like 600,000 to 700,000 per year.[95] As of December 2012 overseas remittances reached the respectable amount of 14.2 billion US Dollars which according to the World Bank statistics consisted of 10.7% of that year's GDP.[96] As for many other South Asian countries, overseas migration is basically a male business. Out of the 8,516,089 people who journeyed abroad for employment purposes, only 246,913 are females, that is, women correspond to only 2.9% of all the migrants who have left Bangladesh.[97] Be that as it may, the realization that women migrants are increasingly growing year after year[98] might give the measure of women's tilting, to their advantage, the balance of traditional gender roles or, perhaps more likely, of the utter poverty and hopelessness in which they find themselves and which forces them to leave, no matter what. While most of the migrants, male and female alike, are directed to the countries of the Middle East, Bangladeshis are actually found working in 143 countries.[99] The great majority of these workers go abroad not to pursue a career as it would be for very skilled people; they actually emigrate to supply their fam-

93. See I. De Silva, *Demographic and Social Trends Affecting Families in the South and Central Asian Region*, op. cit., 14.

94. A. Barkat and M. Ahsan, *Gender and Migration from Bangladesh: Mainstreaming Migration into the National Development Plans from a Gender Perspective* (Dhaka: ILO Country Office, 2014), 4. These numbers refer only to the official figures of people who left via official channels. It is likely that the actual number of people who left unofficially or through clandestine ways may be much higher indeed. Besides, the figure of 8 million refers to the people who actually left, without saying anything of those who eventually returned.

95. Quoted in ibid., 9.

96. See World Bank Website, "Personal Remittances Received (% of GDP)," at <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS>.

97. A. Barkat and M. Ahsan, *Gender and Migration from Bangladesh: Mainstreaming Migration into the National Development Plans from a Gender Perspective*, op. cit., 11. What is already said above for men applies also for the women. What is more, it is estimated that the official number of women corresponds roughly to only 40% of all the women who actually went abroad to work. Ivi.

98. Ibid., 10.

99. Ibid., 9.

ily back home with much needed income, in short, for them migration is a livelihood strategy. At present 52% of these workers make up the category of so-called less skilled workers, which "include housemaids, agricultural workers, hotel workers, and such basic labourers as cleaners, cart loaders, and cotton pickers."[100]

This complex phenomenon of out-migration, however, is not only important for evident economic reasons but also and particularly for the ways in which it may affect and transform the family.

First, since most of the expatriates stay away for at least 2-3 years, and since most of them are married with children, their temporary but long absence from home requires two structural adjustments in the family. The first implies the change of headship in the household which from male headed of tradition now becomes female lead. The second implies instead a sort of transfer of authority from the younger generation of a family to those of an older one. Briefly, if the absence of the husband leaves the wife in charge of the family, it is the whole extended family which is charged with a sort of loose guardianship on the household while its official head, the husband, is away. While modernization, globalization, industrialization and urbanization all contributed to the nucleation of the family, it appears that out-migration somehow requires the resurrection of the traditional family which by its traditional tight network constitutes a sort of safety net around the minimal family and the wife of a man working abroad.

PERCENTAGE OF MALE AND FEMALE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS[101]

	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
Male Headed	85.5	86.7	87.1	124,355	89.3
Female Headed	14.5	13.3	12.9	12.9	10.7

A quick look at the table above can give us an idea of the forces at play. From 2008 to 2012 the percentage of female headed households has kept increasing with the exception of the years 2009 and 2010 in which the percentage remained steady at 12.9. Obviously, female headed household do not depend only on male heads migrating. Widows, divorced or deserted women do exist and enter within the same enumeration. However, a quick look at the statistics on out-migration of those two years reveals that then the rate of people journeying abroad for a job declined tremendously possibly because of the international financial crisis. The following table bears this point out clearly.

100. Ibid., 17.

101. See Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Bureau of Statistics, *Key Indicators on Report of Sample Vital Registration System, 2008–2012*, op. cit., xv.

FLOW OF MIGRANTS[102]

2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
607,798	568,062	390,702	475,278	875,055

While these figures give us a clue to understanding the numerical increase of female headed households they are quite mute about the actual situation and quality of these households. It is generally accepted that female headed households are poorer than those headed by men. As already mentioned above, however, the figures should be disaggregated at least into two main groups: one representing households with widowed female headship and the other representing instead households headed by migrant workers' wives. Whatever the case, it appears that the greater poverty of female headed households does not depend on women as such but on "pre-existing disadvantages of women who become female-heads… Correlations between female-headship and measures of poverty may not in fact be causal."[103]

The second important change caused by the out-migration phenomenon has to do once again with females and their changed gender role. Female*s* staying back home are charged with the prime responsibility to fend for their own family taking decisions whenever necessary, something which used to be part of a male's job. This possibly brings about a revaluation of the female component of the Bengali family. According to Fraser the old adage "You raise your daughter for another's family, but you raise your son for yourself,"[104] thus justifying the son preference of most Bengalis, might just be about to change. She is convinced from her field-work experience that "labour migration" is the mitigating factor of this change in attitude. Women left behind not only are called to act as a buffer for the absence of their male relatives but are also required to sustain the social order of their homes. It appears that women thus support economic development by increasingly shouldering a significant "share of the social and familial burden back home." In her own words: "Daughters in Bangladesh are coming of age in a world very different from the one their mothers and grandmothers experienced."[105]

In the case in which it is the woman who actually migrates, a reverse situation is observable back home. Her absence calls for a resettlement of duties and responsibilities within the family. In the same way in which a woman takes upon herself her absent

102. A. Barkat and M. Ahsan, *Gender and Migration from Bangladesh: Mainstreaming Migration into the National Development Plans from a Gender Perspective*, op. cit., 10.

103. S. Joshi, *Female Household-Headship in Rural Bangladesh: Incidence, Determinants and Impact on Children's Schooling*. Economic Growth Center, Yale University, Discussion Paper 894, September 2004, at <http://aida.econ.yale.edu/growth_pdf/cdp894.pdf>.

104. R. S. Fraser, "Development and Daughters: Changing Familial Roles in Rural Bangladesh," *Societies Without Borders*, 2010, 5/2: 176.

105. Ibid., 183.

husband's responsibilities, it similarly happens with an absent wife. The husband usually increases his engagement in multiple female roles, even though, it is notable that more than the husband it is other members of the family, possibly females, who take on the absentee woman's duties. If undoubtedly a migrant woman's capacity to earn an income augments her value within and without her family, it may also be the cause for an elder son but more likely a daughter to drop out from school to look after his or her younger siblings.[106]

Despite the clues towards positive changes in familial structure caused by far reaching socio-economic transformations in present day Bangladesh, the positive impact of globalization on the family institute cannot be taken for granted. The following section will critically assess the resilience of the Bengali family above and beyond socio-economic changes.

THE BENGALI KINSHIP SYSTEM: BETWEEN REABSORPTION AND REPRODUCTION

The starting point of our reflection is the realization that macro-economic changes are not necessarily by themselves the clue to compulsory changes at the level of kinship relations. After all a system, which was born centuries or millennia ago, cannot be packed up easily and sent into retirement, as it were. On the other hand, we cannot forget Tambiah's warning: "modernization may accentuate and distort a traditional arrangement rather than eradicate it."[107] So if it is true, as we have seen, that modernization has caused diversification of the job market with consequent restructuring of gender assigned roles within the family it is also true that this all happened within the borders of a kinship system which somehow seems to have managed the reabsorption of potentially disrupting novelties.

The hope of a better job opportunity has indeed caused and is causing waves of migrants to move towards the cities in the hope of escaping destitution back home in the villages. Once in the cities, however, these people simply swell peripheries and slums, adding to the ever growing number of the urban proletariat. Their survival relies then on strategies adopted mainly in their own household. The principal one of these strategies is to enter the greatest number of household members in the work force.[108] It is at this point that females from passive family managers become active income providers. Most of the urban poor's earnings, however, are spent on shelter and food, with little concern for clothing, health and education. Children who can work are sent out to earn whatever they can, dropping out from school, if they have ever been to one. Domestic spaces, as it

106. See I. De Silva, *Demographic and Social Trends Affecting Families in the South and Central Asian Region*, op. cit., 11.

107. Quoted in S. Huda, "Dowry in Bangladesh: Compromizing Women's Rights," *South Asia Research*, 2006, 26/3: 250.

108. See S. Hossain, "Poverty, Household Strategies and Copying with Urban Life: Examining 'Livelihood Framework' in Dhaka City, Bangladesh," *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology*, 2005, 2/1: 250, at <http://www.bangladeshsociology.org/BEJS%20-%20Issue%202.1%20final.pdf>.

were, are used, particularly by female members of the family as productive spaces to supplement the father/husband's income. But what is interesting is that in such a precarious setting, social networking is of the utmost importance. Blood relations, *kutum* relations and so called fictive kinship networks, basically with people originating from the same places or district, offer a series of concentric safety nets thrown around the family.

These networks offer information on the urban environment, help with accommodation and employment and constitute a general resource in time of crisis, illness, accident or anything else.[109] Similar to the *somaj* back home, the urban poor do get organized, often according to their place of origin. These informal groupings are charged with sorting out quarrels and resolving arising problems. Similarly to what happens back in the villages, and perhaps even more in the city context, these groupings are often used by politically motivated urban elites which while promising them the whole world they do nothing whatsoever for them.

If an urban environment appears to favour job diversification and consequently the overcoming of traditional gender roles it is also true that the way a poor household reacts to the new setting is typically kinship like. Significantly "the poorest and most vulnerable households are forced to adopt strategies, which enable them to survive but not to improve their welfare."[110]

The kinship system which as we know originated from a complex understanding of substances and of their hierarchical organization, then as much as now, works to maintaining the status quo, a status quo which while it then postulated a landed aristocracy and a mass of subjected peasantry, now requires an urban, political elite and an impoverished and submitted proletariat linked to them by patron-client relationships. I imagine that the same greater freedom of females which allows them employment or under-employment as is often the case, today as yesterday has to be paid with a loss of social status. Women who work in the garment industry, while becoming important income earners for their respective families, become also slaves of their new found freedom. "These women, at an average age of 19, usually unmarried, and with little education, are prone to exploitation, sexual harassment, and discrimination."[111]

Besides their long factory working hours, once home women are often to recap with house chore work. Indeed the economic transformations occurring in the country are certainly changing things around but in such a way that nothing will eventually change. In all this, familial patriarchy results modified in that now the subjection of women requires their work while once it required their claustration. Eventually we might also agree in saying that familial patriarchy has been replaced by a socio-economic and political one: it is estimated that female salaries in the garment industry correspond to only

109. Ibid., 51.

110. Ibid., 46.

111. Danish Trade Union Council for International Development Cooperation, *Bangladesh Labour Market Profile 2014*, op. cit., 15.

60% of the salaries given to their male colleagues. The claim of women empowerment brought about by economic globalization actually may boil down to female economic exploitation and subjection.

Things do not look better if we consider the "empowerment of women" resulting from the out-migration of their husbands. The first thing to notice is that out-migration apart from the apparent economic advantages seems to negatively affect marital stability, so that among migrants a higher incidence of divorces and separations are reported. What is more, it appears that bigamy specifically and polygamy in general are possible outcomes of migrant workers' lives.[112] At the same time instead, it appears that husbands' absence, compels women to take up the responsibility of their own families. Yet we know already that this additional duty is usually buffered by their husbands' maximal families. Grandfathers and mothers, who had been quickly sent into early retirement, reappear on the scene as guardian angels of their expatriate sons' families. It would be interesting to see how much manoeuvring is actually allowed to a lone mother in terms of authentic decision making. I suspect that most women would have to comply with instructions previously given by departing husbands.

My field experience tells me that initially, at least, the departure of a husband may result in a curbing of a woman's horizons, mobility and freedom in general. On the other hand, the departure of a husband puts farther stress on a woman because of the expectations which are actually nested on her. Patriarchy is a complex and rooted phenomenon because it is systemic in nature, that is, it manifests itself pervasively at different institutional levels and in different ways. If patriarchy can be defined as "(a) a set of beliefs that legitimizes male power and authority over women in marriage and (b) a set of attitudes or norms supportive of violence against wives who violate, or who are perceived as violating, the ideals of patriarchy,"[113] then we can imagine that this male superiority can be shown and enforced also by women themselves through what we may call patriarchal delegation.[114] The point which I am trying to make here is whether, if and to what extent the new found empowerment of women is an outcome of patriarchal delegation itself, that is, the result of manipulations of kinship ties.[115]

Things get more and more complicated when it is the woman who emigrates. While it is true that in doing so a working woman increases her financial status as a bread winner, on the other hand, this is paid with a heavy cost in terms of social status. In fact "culturally, women would not or would be less likely to migrate if they or their families were

112. See Indralal De Silva, *Demographic and Social Trends Affecting Families in the South and Central Asian Region*, op. cit., 10, 12.

113. R. T. Naved and L. A. Persson, "Dowry and Spousal Violence Against Women in Bangladesh," *Journal of Family Issues*, 2010, 31/6: 835.

114. See K. Sangari, "Violent Acts: Cultures, Structures and Retraditionalisation," op. cit., 163.

115. Many object that a patriarchal country like Bangladesh is actually ruled by a couple of ladies, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia. The argument however remains always the same: because of the principal of patriarchal delegation it is not enough to be a woman to ensure the end of patriarchy!

not in a dire situation."[116] In practice for some women patriarchy has meant the prohibition for them to migrate; for some others instead that same patriarchy exerted pressure on them in order to leave and thus help out their families. Once there, not only have migrant women to take up low level occupations and jobs, less paid and in poor working conditions, they also have often to endure the unendurable. "Domestic workers, in particular, are at risk of physical, sexual, and emotional abuses, including rape, confinement, underpayment or non-payment of wages, as well as a range of other abuses."[117] Women's vulnerability increases if the channels they chose to emigrate are illegal or informal. It was for all these reasons that the Government of Bangladesh from the 80s repeatedly stopped and forbade the out-migration of women. The ban was finally lifted in 2003.[118]

Female migrants, despite the apparent gain in both freedom and mobility, suffer, however, a double social ailment. While, often succumbing to familial pressure they agree to out-migrate, women are betrayed twice by their own families. Husbands charged with the care of children back home appear to be negligent of their fatherly duties while most of them instead "tend to engage in sexual relationships outside of wedlock."[119] But the second ailment these women suffer from is that once back home, despite their financial achievements, if any,[120] they are actually treated by all, including their own family members, as a kind of hidden prostitutes. Patriarchy, as I said, has innumerable facets.

One of these facets has got to do with the degree of patriarchal internalization undergone by women themselves. Above we have been reminded that patriarchy works best when it is disguised: it actually causes injuries to women while showing only its benevolent paternalistic and protective dimension. Eventually and consequently we may agree that empowerment of women may not thus rely only on the degree of a woman's extrinsic control over resources, economic or otherwise, but should be seen particularly "as a growing intrinsic capability, seen through greater self-confidence and an inner transformation of women's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers to accessing resources or changing traditional ideology."[121] Increased mobility, financial solvency, employment while all clues to big changes as compared to a not so far away past, are just not enough to measure the demise of patriarchal ideology.

116. A. Barkat and M. Ahsan, *Gender and Migration from Bangladesh: Mainstreaming Migration into the National Development Plans from a Gender Perspective*, op. cit., 20.

117. Ibid., 21.

118. Ibid., 11.

119. I. De Silva, *Demographic and Social Trends Affecting Families in the South and Central Asian Region*, op. cit., 26.

120. This is not always the case. Often women, but to a lesser extent also men, to pay for the expenditure accrued in going abroad have to take on such big loans which will then take a lifetime to repay. I personally know of a woman who after having worked for a number of years in Lebanon just managed to pay back her loans with her Lebanese earnings. See A. Barkat and M. Ahsan, *Gender and Migration from Bangladesh: Mainstreaming Migration into the National Development Plans from a Gender Perspective*, op. cit., 25.

121. P. Shahnaj, "Gender Awareness of Rural Women in Bangladesh," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 2007, 9/1: 255.

The table below collecting results of a study carried out among women of three villages in the Mymensingh district graphically shows what women think about their social status and what enhances or diminishes it.

WOMEN STATUS AS PERCEIVED BY THEM[122]

Positive Traits	*Income earning ability*	95%
	Having physical beauty	92%
	High status of natal family	91%
	Giving heavy dowry during marriage	85%
	Having Sons	80%
Negative Traits	*Divorced, raped, widows, acid survivors*	96%
	Women with mental and physical disabilities	91%
	No or very low education	86%
	Poor reproductive health	48%
	Very young housewives	48%

While the data shows the transformations which have occurred because of the new socio-economic environment, for instance the importance given to earning women, at the same time it shows the persistence in the value system of those women of a predominantly induced patriarchal agenda. If "conscientization involves taking control of one's own life and acquiring understanding of the social, religious and cultural restrictions that limit one's potential for personal development,"[123] then the study just mentioned above shows that most of the rural women of the sample surveyed, "were not aware of gender inequality because of (*sic*) traditional beliefs kept them in the shadow of their fathers, husbands and sons."[124]

From our discussion so far it turns out clearly that, if patriarchal relations in the family appear to be somehow changing, if not disappearing outright, they are still strong enough in society which comes to the family's rescue reinterpreting its norms, forms and manifestations and perpetuates thus hierarchical relationships. Modernity in this sense did not eradicate tradition but it radicalised it. From an economy of cooperation of bygone agrarian societies, the present economy of competition cannot but exploit Bangladeshi female cultural weakness, codified in both family and society, to maximise economic

122. See Ibid., 259.
123. Ibid., 254.
124. Ibid., 265.

profit. Interestingly, the strategies of the socio-cultural forces set in motion by modernity seem to produce changes but they produce them only selectively and differentially. In this respect, the study of Parveen Shahnaj clearly shows the existence of a selective awareness in women. Thus while they are aware of the equality of men and women as far as political rights are concerned, yet they seem to be unaware of the discrimination of which they are both the subject and object in their expression of son preference.[125] However, beyond the vested manipulation of modern economy and its elites there is also a manipulation of kinship values and norms done this time by women themselves, if not to do away with patriarchy, at least to functionally manage it.

Generally speaking, it can be said that today's Bangladeshi women have become socially more visible, economically more independent and more assertive in general. However when it comes to marriage "qualities of eligibility are much the same as before, especially the value put on purity and chastity."[126] When women were strictly under the unwritten rules and regulations of *porda* it was relatively easy to ascertain the purity and chastity of a woman, but now that women move around, take up employment and have a social life, as it were, this is no easy matter.

While the problem lingers on for prospective grooms and possibly their parents, women themselves have attempted their own solutions. Because of modernity, strict *porda* requirements cannot be enforced anymore. These, as we know, would entail physical segregation of women within their households and an end to women's mobility, the lifeline of the modern world. If mobility cannot be renounced *porda* however appears to be reinterpretable. Many women seem to displace and shift the importance of *porda* from the spatial domain to the moral one. Thus *porda* becomes no longer a question of physical segregation but of personal morality. Responding to the researcher's stimulation "women frequently said that *purdah* was an internal state (*porda holo moner bepar*) and that one could maintain it even while going outside. Observing *purdah* depends on *niyot* (intention) and it is one's own responsibility to maintain it."[127] Expressions like *bhalo thaka nijer kache* ("to be good depends on oneself") just reflect a moral and personal internalization of social norms which stresses personal responsibility over and above external images of oneself. Conversely and to stress the point, women who do not observe seclusion say that those who do and wear the *burkha* (a gown like over dress used by women to cover themselves in public), house underneath *soetan* (the devil), once again stressing that purity or chastity are not guaranteed by external conditions, but by internal dispositions only.

To protect their own reputation, women tend however to highlight traditional female appropriate behaviour this time applying it or bending it to their new situation. So, for instance, a woman may qualify herself as a good woman because after factory work she

125. See ibid., *passim*.

126. S. Huda, "Dowry in Bangladesh: Compromizing Women's Rights," op. cit., 254.

127. A. Naher, *Gender, Religion, and Development in Rural Bangladesh* (Unpublished PHD dissertation, Heidelberg University, 2005), 196.

goes straight home, she does not linger about and does not mix unnecessarily with men to whom she is obviously not related.[128]

What is more, a woman tries to secure her newly found mobility by using the female tools of Bengali tradition such as an *orna* (a rectangular piece of light clothing used by girls and women to cover their breast and head), a *burkha*, an umbrella or just the *sari* worn in such a way as to conceal the woman's body completely. In this sense, more than compliance with the Bengali *porda* tradition, women defend themselves from often nasty behaviour of males standing by while women move around in places like bazars, streets and all public spaces which by definition are masculine. Older women, in this respect, manifest greater autonomy than younger ones who, in rural areas, do not usually venture alone outside the boundaries of one's own village. Interestingly, in cases in which women are actually threatened, bothered and victim*s* of harassment, sexual or otherwise, they turn the table over to patriarchy. They thus accuse the *somaj* of failing in one of its important functions, that of protecting women and their virtue.

But women defend their reputation by strategically using kinship morality as well. They do so employing a kin terminology to address unknown or unrelated men. So a total stranger may become a *bhai* (brother) or a *kaka* (paternal uncle) according to his seniority or otherwise in relation to the woman addressing him. In so doing the woman somehow de-sexualises the relationship and brings it within the bounds of traditional acceptability. Besides, in using kin terminology she is expecting to be treated by him as if she was indeed his kin. The male should acknowledge this and thus reciprocate the woman's expectations since his duty is the protection of the females of his kin group.[129] Once again patriarchy kicks in, this time however, strategically aroused by women themselves.

Public and private, social and domestic are not separated but are constituted jointly, in a sort of continuum, which is possibly why they are not amenable to a tradition-versus-modernity reading.[130] Patriarchy results as so difficult to tackle simply because it is systemic in nature, as already mentioned above. It grows on tradition, culture and religion to constitute a moral framework of appropriateness[131] from which it is indeed difficult to escape. Patriarchy is so resilient even because it is exploited by economic and political forces in order to maintain social inequality and hierarchies. In fact "what is at stake is more than kinship bonds, the purity of caste, marriage codes and the 'honour' of the community: it is also the maintenance of social status, caste hierarchies and material inequalities, and an attempt by caste *panchayats* to cling on to power."[132] The comment

128. Ibid., 197.

129. Ibid., 198.

130. See K. Sangari, "Violent Acts: Cultures, Structures and Retraditionalisation," op. cit., 170.

131. For the concept of appropriateness as a moral framework of reference see M. A. Hossain, "Influence of Social Norms and Values of Rural Bangladesh on Women's Participation in the Union Parishad," *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 2012, 19/3: 396.

132. K. Sangari, "Violent Acts: Cultures, Structures and Retraditionalisation," op. cit., 165.

was originally meant by the author for an Indian context, however, with the necessary contextualization, it may be very meaningful for Bangladesh as well.

Positively or negatively as the case may be, the kinship system and its values are actually open to interpretations and reinterpretations to suit one or the other interested actors. Nevertheless, there are ambits in which, it appears, patriarchy cannot come to any compromise and thus resorts to violence as to its last expedient to re-impose *sic at simpliciter* its own values, prerogatives, power. In Bangladesh the practice of dowry and the sad reality of domestic violence are two such ambits. Notably, here patriarchy dismisses its disguised look of protective benevolence and manifests itself for what it really is, just prevarication and subjugation. In this sense, violence, in all its forms, comes to brutally reinforce power relations somehow threatened or felt to be threatened by modernity.[133]

Dowry (*joutuk*) can be taken as a clear example of something which modernization not only failed to eradicate but actually contributed to create. Many even today ascribe to Hindu tradition the roots of today's evil practice of *joutuk*. However in traditional Hindu law, dowry is the bride's property which she takes with her to the groom's house, a sort of making up for the share of her father's property which she will not inherit. If originally, in Hindu tradition *joutuk* were gifts accompanying the gift of a daughter (*konnadan*), now it has become a compulsory requirement, nearly a form of extortion. In Bangladesh the dowry constitutes now what is required by the groom's family, something over which she will have no control whatsoever. Muslims do seem, however, to have some sort of historical responsibility, as it were, for today's custom. In Muslim tradition "*jehaz, jahez or jahaiz* are gifts given by the girl's side" and are part of marriage transactions. Apparently, in the past, affluent Muslim families vied with each other in making bigger and bigger dowries and thus increasing the family's social prestige.[134] Whatever the past influence, it looks as if the present practice of dowry is a fairly recent one and goes back at the most to the 60s:[135] more than having to do with religion, dowry is an economic issue, something which has got to do with modern materialism.

Be that as it may, the practice of dowry became so popular in Bangladesh that by the 1990s close to 80% of all the rural marriages involved its payment.[136] Undoubtedly behind the extraordinary proliferation of dowry there is its "positive connection with female subordination" which finds favour in patriarchal societies like that of Bangladesh.[137] This means that it is likely enough that practices which favour men in a patriarchal society easily obtain a sort of cultural dominance. However, the spread of dowry not only is the outcome of an already existing patriarchal system but it becomes also the cause for its

133. Ibid., 161.

134. See for the whole question of traditional religious practices influencing the modern custom of dowry, Shahnaz Huda, "Dowry in Bangladesh: Compromizing Women's Rights," op. cit., 250.

135. Ibid., 249.

136. R. T. Naved and L. A. Persson, "Dowry and Spousal Violence Against Women in Bangladesh," op. cit., 832.

137. See S. Huda, "Dowry in Bangladesh: Compromizing Women's Rights," op. cit., 253.

farther radicalization. In fact dowry demands, in practice, come to reinforce and justify the son preference of parents, and thus the reaffirmation of men superiority over women, so common in Bengal. In many instances the payment of dowry has reduced to poverty the family of the bride, increasing consequently parents' aversion to having daughters, the causes, indeed, of future economic burdens. Significantly, Lindenbaum sees in the phenomenal spread of dowry a change in the prestige system of Bengal. While in the past land was the true signifier of social status and family alliances were built in order to preserve land and increase social prestige through a careful exchange of daughters in marriage, in the present, because of the commercialization brought about by modernization, available financial resources have become the new signifier of social standing and power. In the process, daughters have been reduced to commodities, the tools of modern materialism.[138]

Nevertheless, for our purposes dowry is important in that it embodies a clear link between patriarchy and violence against women. Obviously, not all violence is justified by or centred on dowry, yet "it cannot be denied that dowry demands and disagreements over dowry are a significant source of violence against women."[139] The following table may bear this out.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN BECAUSE OF DOWRY: JANUARY–MARCH 2015[140]

Age	13–18	19–24	25–30	30+	Not mentioned	Total	Cases filed
Kind of violence							
Physical torture	3	2	1	1	8	15	9
Suicide after torture	–	3	–	–	–	3	1
Death after physical torture	3	12	8	5	12	40	20
Total	**6**	**17**	**9**	**6**	**20**	**58**	**30**

Furthermore, it appears that dowry within the framework of patriarchy and with its economic potential is what provides a husband with a reason to abuse and even kill a wife in order to get himself another dowry. However, it must be clear, violence when linked to dowry is not only the result of a failure by a bride's parents to pay for it. Often dowry vio-

138. Shirley Lindenbaum quoted in ibidem.

139. Ibid., 260.

140. Table worked out from Ain o Salish Kendra, "Violence Against Women-Dowry: January–March 2015," at <http://www.askbd.org/ask/2015/04/01/violence-women-dowry-january-march-2015/>. It is to be noticed that the statistics given here and below are worked out by ASK by monitoring a number of English and Bangla dailies. They just report happenings as they actually appeared in papers. We do not actually know the number of cases which did not manage to surface.

lence occurs also when large dowry payments have been actually carried out. This means that dowry demands in themselves, being an indicator of the patriarchal attitude of the marital home, unfortunately, pave the way to future wife abuse. In a way dowry demands predict future violence, independently from the status of dowry payments. What is more, we may even add that demand of dowry and acceptance to pay it both manifest the same patriarchal attitude which is rooted in the belief of women lower status as compared to that of men. It is this cultural construction of women's inferiority which eventually ushers in and justifies their possible abuse. Rightly Naved and Persson comment that "violence against women occurs least in egalitarian relationships and that lack of power predicts violence."[141]

Unfortunately dowry related violence is only one kind of violence with women as victims. Domestic violence is just another facet of the same patriarchal coin. In a way dowry related violence may be considered as an example of a more general domestic violence. This last phenomenon appears to infect the whole of South Asia, where domestic violence seems to assume a nearly institutionalised role, reflecting a high degree of social acceptance. This latter, we know, comes out of a distinct gender inequality and a high degree of dependence of women on men which constitute females as powerless and thus suitable, as it were, to experience violence. The table below gives us an idea of what domestic violence is all about.

INCIDENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN BANGLADESH FOR THE PERIOD JANUARY–MARCH 2015[142]

Age	7–18	19–24	25–30	30+	Not mentioned	Total	Cases filed
Kind of violence							
Tortured by husband	2	2	1	1	5	11	3
Murdered by husband	3	16	12	11	16	58	32
Murdered by husband's family members	1	4	1	2	2	10	5
Murdered by own relative	–	–	–	4	–	4	2
Suicide	1	8	2	4	1	16	3
Total	**7**	**30**	**16**	**22**	**24**	**99**	**45**

The official reasons usually given by husbands to explain the why of such senseless violence refer to the wife going out without asking permission; neglect of children; arguing

141. R. T. Naved and L. A. Persson, "Dowry and Spousal Violence Against Women in Bangladesh," op. cit., 831.

142. Table worked out from A. S. Kendra, "Violence Against Women – Domestic Violence: January–March 2015," at <http://www.askbd.org/ask/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/vaw_domestic_violence_march_2015.pdf>.

with husband; refusing sex to husband and burning the food.[143] It is amazing to notice that 72 wives lost their lives in three months for these futile reasons and another 16 of them in the same time period, and for the same reasons, committed suicide. It is difficult to have a clear-cut picture of the incidence of domestic violence in Bangladesh. However, the World Health Organization, just to mention a reliable study, among possible others, revealed that "more than 50 per cent of the women in Bangladesh were subjected to physical or sexual violence by intimate partners.

The lifetime prevalence of partner violence (either physical or sexual) was observed to be 53.4 per cent in the urban and 61.7 per cent in the rural areas of Bangladesh."[144] Domestic violence against women has become so pervasive a phenomenon that eventually the government of Bangladesh in 2010 promulgated the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act followed recently by the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Rules 2013.[145] It is difficult to say how much this legislation is being effective in preventing and protecting women from domestic violence. The phenomenon being systemic has also much to do with women's reticence in talking about it and in looking for redress. Family honour, shame, fear of hurting children etc. command women to stay silent and bear the physical and psychological scars of violence. Unfortunately, the family, the household, the places in which one is supposed to find peace and refuge are for many women places of pain and humiliation.

Be it domestic or dowry related violence one thing seems to be clear: violence is a point of patriarchal reproduction.[146] Commonly acts of violence even though perpetrated within the family are meant to be "pedagogic and symbolic," that is, they aspire to teach a lesson to all women, to tell them what their places are in society. Modernity may indeed have brought about enormous changes in the life of Bangladeshi*s*. It has also changed the fixed gender roles of tradition. Through disguise, delegation and manipulation it has also reinterpreted the kinship system and updated and adapted it to the new socio-economic situation. However, modernization could not disguise its patriarchal bias and continued exploiting of gender inequality. The dirty job of enforcing it has fallen on the shoulders of the traditional Bengali family. Inequality is violence, and social hierarchy is patriarchy.

Bangladesh is in the middle of a transition even though it is not yet clear where this transition is directed. So far the family and the kinship system it stems from like an entro-

143. See K. T. Hossain and M. S. Rashid Sumon, "Violence against Women: Nature, Causes and Dimensions in Contemporary Bangladesh," *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology*, 2013, 10/: 82, at <http://www.bangladeshsociology.org/BEJ%2010.1%20Final.pdf>.

144. WHO, *Multi-country Study on women's health and domestic violence against women: Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2005). Quoted in Tania Wahed and Abbas Bhuiya, "Battered bodies & shattered minds: Violence against women in Bangladesh," *Indian Journal of Medical Research*, 2007, 126: 343.

145. The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Rules 2013 can be seen at <http://mowca.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mowca.portal.gov.bd/page/422902f2_ddc0_40b8_898b_d277b8f2cf56/Domestic-Violence-Rules-English.pdf>.

146. See K. Sangari, "Violent Acts: Cultures, Structures and Retraditionalisation," op. cit., 170.

pic system has shown a remarkable capacity for adaptation. Its intrinsic violence however cannot be hidden by positive economic indicators which still fail to address women's concerns. In the final statement of the National Conference on Securing Women's Economic Rights in Marital Relationships through the Law, it was vented:

> We are… concerned by recent research reports indicating that "*marital breakdown is one of the key causes of ultra and extreme poverty among women in Bangladesh*" (United Nations' Common Country Assessment of Bangladesh, 2005) and that despite making substantial contributions to household income and family assets, women are denied their economic entitlements and shares in marital property by discriminatory laws and deeply entrenched patriarchal values.[147]

In addition, if numbers say something of reality then the shortage of female*s* as compared to male*s* resulting from subsequent censuses speaks loudly of a gross inequality and discrimination between genders.[148] This is the sign that all is changing so that nothing changes!

CONCLUSION

Recognising the great changes undergone by Bangladesh at all levels, I have attempted to answer one basic question. Once postulated that the kinship system is the resultant of a complex intertwining among societal, cultural, economic and political instances, it was to be verified if changes intervened particularly at the socio-economic level had modified the cultural or ideological framework of the Bengali kinship structure and in it of the family.

The first main section of the paper has thus tried to revisit, through history, the cultural origins of the Bengali kinship system, discovered in its Hindu past. Linked to the *varna* template, kin relations have been seen as related to a complex cosmological vision in which different substances are hierarchically ordained. Similarly, the *attio-sojon* was and is a general category to indicate relatives of all sorts whose common kin quality is established by the sharing in different degree of bodily and non-bodily substances.

In the second section, I have attempted to link the Bengali kin structure thus discovered to its apparent socio-economic environment. Land ownership and patron-client relationships have been thus recognized as the key socio-economic determinants of

147. National Conference on Securing Women's Economic Rights in Marital Relationships through the Law organised by Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST). 14–15th September 2012, Gono Shasthya Kendra, Savar. Conference Statement no. 4, at <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related_material/ConferenceStatement-14–15-Sept-2012.pdf>. Emphasis as in the original.

148. As of 1 July, 2012 the population of Bangladesh stood at 152.7 million of whom 78.2 million were male and 74.5 million female, for a sex ratio of 104.9. See Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Bureau of Statistics, *Key Indicators on Report of Sample Vital Registration System, 2008–2012*, op. cit., xv.

both *varna* and kinship relations. What is more, identifying *varna* hierarchy with the then political structure or state of Bengal, I postulated the necessity of the policing of women's body to guarantee and perpetuate social hierarchy. This was achieved through caste endogamy. Eventually the cultural construction of men's superiority over women required to justify men's control over them through patriarchy was enshrined in the family via patrilineal descent and patrilocal residence, something still extant today.

The third section mapping the macro-economic changes of the last few decades has analysed the changes brought about by modernization and globalization, the latter causing redrawing of the boundaries of gender specific roles. Starting out from positive demographic changes, migration both within and outside the country has been seen as a new opportunity for women's empowerment. Similarly, the job diversification which occurred because of the globalization of the markets has seen women taking up new employment opportunities, overcoming age-old customs such as *porda* which severely restricted their mobility.

In the last part of the paper I problematize instead the data emerged particularly in the third section. While undoubtedly changes have taken place I have cautioned against the naïve belief of considering modernity *per se* as enough to transform or eradicate tradition. A critical review of the data has revealed the costs paid by women for their modernization. Despite clear advantages, modernization has also radicalised relations of exploitation and the hierarchies they rely upon. The Bengali kinship system has been seen on the one hand as adapting to the new modern setting, reabsorbing the new within a modified version of its old self. On the other hand, the kinship structure in its localised, familial dimension has shown all its patriarchal virulence when threatened in its prerogatives of gender supremacy, by violently reaffirming itself above and beyond any past interpretations or modern re-interpretations. Domestic and dowry related violence have been shown as clear examples of this, as the points of actual reproduction of patriarchy. The latter throughout has been seen as systemic in nature, the result of concurrent institutions, formal and informal alike, among which family, society and state. Patriarchy is thus not only a characteristic of the Bengali family but a pervasive feature of a whole society affecting all its institutions and manifestations.

Finally defining the Bengali kinship system as entropic I wanted to highlight its resilience in front of so many odds. Apparently and so far, the Bengali family has managed to absorb a good measure of modern disruption without losing its patriarchal identity. Indeed I suspect that modernity itself with its globalising processes might be driven by patriarchal forces, this time beyond the borders of Bangladesh. This would explain why the Bengali kinship structure and within it the family continue maintaining its strength and consistence.

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Indonesia

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The family represents the smallest and most universal component of any society. In 1949, after having analyzed families in 250 societies throughout the world, George Murdock claimed that the family universally performs four basic functions, namely: sexual, reproductive, economic and educational. All of them are essential to the existence of society: without sexual and reproductive functions there would not be new members of society, without the economic function society would be extinguished, and without education there would be no culture.[1] Since the family is such an important

1. A short presentation of G. Murdock's theory of family's functions is available at <http://vcampus.uom.ac.mu/soci1101/541functionalist_perspective_on_the_family.html>. Speaking of the Indonesian cultural context, Bernard Rahao says that family functions are: guaranteeing descendants; satisfying the basic needs of its members; facilitating the process of socialization (apprehending faith, values, norms and behaviors that help the child to adapt to his or her social framework); determining the status of the individual (having a name, being member of a particular family, having a social status etc.); protecting and helping its members; interfacing its members with external institutions, such

factor in shaping individuals and consequently also society and culture, it is worthwhile considering the family and its evolution within the Indonesian context. The Indonesian culture (or more properly "Indonesian cultures") cannot then be approached without knowing the dynamics that happen within the family. Moreover, at least in the South East Asian context, it is clear that the individual cannot be considered a monad separated from other elements within society. The person finds self-identification within the communitarian framework. Therefore, the individual must be always studied in the context of his or her human relations, in particular the primary ones, which are represented by his or her own family.

Unfortunately, contextualized literature on the evolution of the concept of family in Indonesia is somewhat lacking, especially updated studies. The main sources for sociological studies on family are still investigations and analyses done within the western cultural context. The most recent serious study on the Javanese Family seems to be the one produced by Hildreed Geerz at the end of the 1950s.[2] This means that such an important topic deserves a new synthesis beyond western assumptions. Without misrecognizing western outcomes, Indonesian sociologists should do more in studying the issue of family through a more contextualized reflection.

This paper is divided into two parts. The first part offers a description of the traditional family, whose values and norms are still influencing the modern concept of Indonesian family, especially in the rural areas. This part is lengthier because it touches two different cultural milieu: the Mentawaian and the Javanese. The former represents one of the most antique cultural environments in Indonesia, whilst the latter is an evolved and complex cultural system, which has developed in Java, and has become the most influential cultural paradigm throughout the Archipelago. The second part of the paper tries to summarize some elements that characterize the evolution of the concept of family due to modernization.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to fr. Hibertus Hartono MSF, Executive Secretary of the Commission for Family of the Bishops Conference of Indonesia, for his kindness, the time he reserved for me and also for the information he provided during an interview that has been very helpful in finding orientation for dealing with this topic.

THE TRADITIONAL INDONESIAN FAMILY

The Mentawaian Family

The Mentawaian society is constituted by different clans (*Uma*), which are in their turn

as productive, religious, and educational institutions. See B. Raho, *Keluarga Berizarah Lintas Zaman. Suatu Tinjauan Sosiologis* (Ende: Nusa Indah, 2003), 41–52.

2. See T. Omas Ihromi ed., *Bunga Rampai Sosiologi Keluarga* (Yayasan Obor Indonesia: Jakarta, 2004), VII–VIII.

composed of nuclear families. Actually, the term "*Uma*" does not only refer to the clan, but also indicates the big house functioning as the clan's meeting point for ritual celebrations and other big events. Traditionally, the Mentawaians do not acknowledge the concept of village, which in fact has been imported in this Archipelago by the Indonesian government as an alien social structure. Instead, traditionally the Mentawaians live as single nuclear families, dwelling in houses isolated from each other and located along the rivers, close to their fields. Therefore, according to tradition lifestyle, the Mentawaians gather with other clan members only on occasions of special celebrations and traditional feasts (*lia*).

In this particular cultural context, the family plays an important role as the fundamental cell of society, as the smallest unit that constitutes the clan. But the nuclear family is even more important in this than in other cultural contexts, because in the Mentawaian jungle people live physically confined within their familial milieu, having only occasionally the chance to interact with people who are not their own close relatives. We must also remember that up to several years ago—but in fact in several areas the situation has not yet changed—moving from one place to another is very difficult (people travel only by boat and on foot) and therefore many people do not have the chance to cross the boundaries of their own territory, not even having the chance to visit villages or *umas* located only few Kilometers away.[3]

The Mentawaian marriage is strictly monogamous. The concept of polygamy is totally unknown in the Mentawaian context apart from what they know about the Islamic practice. At the same time, it seems that homosexuality, in the sense of stable same sex relationship, is completely unknown. This does not mean that same-sex eroticism cannot occasionally occur, especially with friends, when taboos force to sexual abstinence with the partner. Nevertheless, homosexual behavior has only the function of reaching sexual pleasure, whilst it never has the significance of aiming at a durable homosexual relationship.[4]

Sexual intercourse in the Mentawaian context is seen as indulging in a natural drive and thus is far from being considered scandalous. The need to have sexual intercourse is seen as a biological need, which has to be followed. As they say: "*Ioba tubukku*" (my body wants it). For this reason, premarital sex can be rather frequent. This also depends on the fact that virginity is not considered an important value to be preserved until the wedding, even if this does not mean that all girls lose their virginity before marriage. For these reasons, sexual intercourse can commonly occur before and outside ratified relationships, whether it be wedding or betrothal. Nevertheless, this does not mean that free

3. I moved out of Mentawai in 2006. At that time, it took 2 or 3 days walking in the jungle or canoeing, to travel the 40 Km necessary to cross the island of Siberut. At present, the situation is quickly evolving, since the local government has started building roads connecting villages.

4. See T. Caissutti, *La cultura mentawaiana* (Sikabaluan: Pro Manuscripto), 50.

sex is allowed within the Mentawaian society. Extramarital sex is fined as a transgression, especially if it involves a person who is already committed to a partner.[5]

A young boy gets married because he has to "*masiukkaake lalep*," which means "carrying the house on one's shoulders." Getting married means to move from the status of young person to adulthood. Before marriage, the person does not have a position in society, whilst after it he or she becomes *sikebbukat*, that is an adult to be honored and worthy to be listened to as source of wisdom. Girls get married with three particular tasks to accomplish: to keep the house and help in the fields, to provide offspring, and to be a sexual partner. On the other side, the boy who gets married is entrusted with other responsibilities: to protect the family, to have children, and to sexually satisfy his wife. Thus, according to Caissutti, the purpose of building a relationship based on mutual love or even to have a partner with whom to share friendship and deep communication are not so important in the traditional idea of marriage. Romantic love and the wish to have a partner to share intimacy and friendship are rather new issues, which pertain more to new generations, who have the chance to get formal education and are influenced by modernity through the media.[6]

Official engagement generally happens with the agreement and the active participation of both families. Normally the boy and the girl have already decided to start their relationship before involving their families. Thus, the boy's mother talks with her husband and then to the girl's mother, by visiting and giving her a simple gift such as a piece of cloth. After these preliminary steps, if a positive outcome is foreseen, the mother ot the boy informs the girl's father. The definitive decision is in the hands of the girl's father who normally agrees only with the consent of his daughter. Then the boy's father pays visit to the girl's father. Only after lengthily chatting, they a formal agreement. Then, the girl's father starts dissembling the qualities of the girl, affirming that she is not good at cooking, she cannot work hard etc. Nevertheless, and dispite this negotiation, an agreement is reached only after having obtained the girl's consent. If she agrees, the two become officially engaged. Otherwise, negotiations will not proceed.

It is interesting to notice that the daughter's consent is generally taken into consideration,[7] giving to her the possibility to deny the boy's petition. This means that even if the Mentawaian marriage involves the respective families, it preserves the free will of girls and boys. In case of unsurmountable difficulties and opposition by the families, it is also possible for the two to run away and start living together. Once the girl is pregnant, the parents will surely consent to the marriage. In the past, in several areas marriage could also happen through kidnapping, especially when it occurred against the will of the girl and her family.[8]

5. The word "virgin" is not present in the Mentawaian vocabulary. This term is usually translated by the word "*siokko*", which in fact means "young girl," without any reference to her virginity.

6. See T. Caissutti, *La cultura mentawaiana*, op. cit., 33.

7. Ibid., 56.

8. Ibid., 28–9.

An important characteristic of the betrothal period is the definition of the dowry that the boy's family must give to the counterpart. Actually, the main issue during engagement is to establish the list of things to be given as gifts in order to obtain the girl. On the other hand, the idea of betrothal as the period of time in which the two can better know each other and deepen their relationship gets less priority in the Mentawaian mentality. This happens also because, once engaged, they undergo many taboos that prevent them from communicating easily. They are forbidden to stop and talk to each other when they meet, or sit in front of the other, whilst they can sit side by side. Other taboos prevent them from eating some kinds of fish and uncooked shrimps, eating from the same dish, and finally drinking from the same glass.[9] The list of the gifts given to the girl's family is variable from one place to another and it is never a fixed one. Therefore, long negotiations are necessary to fill the proper list of crops, animals and objects to be given: durian, sagu and palm trees, taro and jackfruits; chickens and pigs (pigs are a must); axes, machetes, pans, fishing nets, etc.[10]

On the other hand, the boy's family will receive a number of pigs correspondent to the dowry given to the girl's family. This creates a balanced contract between the two counterparts. The bigger the dowry, the bigger is the amount of pigs to be offered back to the boy's family. This means that a poor boy will not be able to marry a girl whose family is rich in pigs and vice versa. Moreover, if the compensation of the two parts is not fulfilled before the marriage, then the two can split only because of the unpaid dept. Nevertheless, it must be underlined that the dowry system has been in the past a natural tool for giving stability to the family. Divorces rarely happened in the past just because of the complexity of the contract between the two families established through the dowry system. According to Caissutti, the intervention of the government which has forced a change in the dowry system—that was superficially considered a "buying the girl" like operation—by substituting it with the more "Indonesian" *mas kawin* (the classic dowry, consisting in money or goods given only by the boy's family to the future wife's one), has produced the increment of divorce rates among the Mentawaians. Moreover, since both sides are involved in the exchange of gifts, the traditional way of arranging the dowry does not lead to "buying the girl", since the transaction is balanced between both families.[11]

The final stage of betrothal is called *pangala sikolui* ("taking the girl"). The ceremony can be solemn with a special blessing, or very simple, which means the boy takes the girl home, even without having lunch together with her parents. Then the two start living together in the same house. Most of the *keikei* (taboos) do not bind anymore, but some others are enforced. The two are not allowed to talk about the wedding plans or to cook roasted meat. Violation of such taboos can produce death, illness, or at least the death of the pigs that have been prepared for the wedding.

9. Ibid., 31.
10. Ibid., 30.
11. Ibid., 32.

Finally the wedding ceremony, called *pangureijat* (litteraly "taking husband"), is celebrated once the amount of pigs to be provided by the girl's family have been met. The meaning of the ceremony is to let *Ulaumanua* (the Highest Spirit) know that they are already husband and wife, and this means the termination of taboos that had tied them during betrothal. The celebration takes place in the *Uma* (the extended family house) belonging to the boy's clan. Generally the wedding ceremonies last for three days and consist of different elements: prayers, blessing, offerings to the ancestors and eating together. The bride and groom are blessed and prayed over, in particular so that they may be protected from diseases.

The end of these celebrations is cause for joy, also because it puts an end to all the prohibitions and so life is finally back to normal. In the North of Siberut Island, the end of taboos is celebrated in some areas with the ceremony called *pakandei*. A considerable number of pigs must be brought by the girl's father to be slaughtered for a shared meal. The game *pagalai* also takes place; this involves communal wrestling in an open space. This game involves everybody, men and women, in an enthusiastic explosion of joy, that marks the end of taboos.

All the Mentawaian know that conception occurs as consequence of sexual intercourse. They believe that life comes from the semen delivered from the husband to the wife's womb. The role of the wife is to provide the appropriate and protective environment that allows the fetus to grow. It is for this reason that the offspring is the exclusive property of the father, or of his family, and not of the mother, who, it is thought, does not make any active contribution to the emerging of life. It is also believed that a higher frequency of sexual intercourses can improve the quality of the fetus, who will grow stronger because of the availability of more semen. It is for this reason that people commonly think that pregnancy cannot be the result of occasional intercourse.

The Mentawaians acknowledge a number of potions and ointments to procure abortion in case of unwanted pregnancy. On the other hand, there are medications which are thought to help conception to occur.[12] During pregnancy, husband and wife undergo a number of prohibitions that encompass several activities including sex and eating. The wife is forbidden to have sexual intercourse, cut crops hitting them more than once, make knots or fasten things, seed crops, get angry or curse at people. The husband is burdened with similar taboos. He cannot slaughter animals, nail things, and he must abide by other kinds of prohibitions. All these rules are meant to preserve the baby's health and to prevent problems during pregnancy at the time of delivery. In particular, violation of sexual taboos from both sides during pregnancy can result in the baby's death.

Delivery is done with the assistance of the husband or of other women. Women make use of medications in order to ease the process and prevent bleeding. The umbilical cord is cut with a blade made of bamboo, whilst the placenta is buried or conserved by being put on a tree, since it is believed to embody a particular soul or energy (*kina*). The Men-

12. Ibid., 47.

tawaians call placenta *alei*, which means "friend" (the baby's friend). If it does not come out and the woman dies, it means that the *alei* got angry because the father had violated sexual taboos by having sex with another woman. In this case, the father will be sanctioned by the wife's family.

After three days the baby is taken to the river to be bathed. His father immerses the baby three times into the water uttering mantras asking for the baby to be brave and strong, to be diligent and skilled at work, and to avoid taboo's infringements. The father also asks the spirit of the waters to protect his baby from any kind of disease. Then, after seven days from birth, the *pulaulaunu* ceremony takes place, ie, the purification of the mother. The prayers and the ritual cleansing are meant to give back strength to the woman who has just given birth, and to protect her from harm and disease. In this context the baby is given a name which is chosen with the consensus of the family. The *Rimata*, namely the clan's chief, imposes the name after consulting a chicken's intestines. If the verdict is negative, the family has to choose a more suitable name. During this ritual, some offerings are provided to the Highest Spirit, *Ulaumanua*. Then, all prohibitions are over, except the sexual taboo which ends 40 days after birth, at the time when the baby has his or her hair cut.[13]

Among the Mentawaians, after marriage the wife becomes a member of her husband's clan. The husband has the right to ask her to work at what represents the wife duty, but not more than that. If the husband's request exceeds the proper standard of work, then the woman's family can intervene to protect her. In sexual life, as in other Indonesian cultures, the husband has right to have sex anytime he wants, except during menstruation. The wife has no right to refuse it. However, in the case of severe mistreatment or abuse the woman's family can inflict sanctions (*tulou*) on her husband. If the situation escalates beyond tolerance, the woman's father can take his daughter back home. In this case, the husband loses property from what he has given as dowry. On the other hand, children still belong to their father. If they are still nursing, she will feed them up to weaning and then will be paid for the service provided.[14]

As we have seen above, sexual intercourse seems not to imply something impure, sinful, nor sacred and mystical, as it could be in other cultures. Many teenagers are already sexually initiated before official betrothal. Promiscuity is rather common in families which still live according to a traditional lifestyle, where people spend most of the time together on the veranda of their traditional houses, and probably have already witnessed their own parents making love. Besides, until several decades ago, before the arrival of foreign logging companies, sexual diseases had not been spotted in the Mentawaian territory. For all these reasons, premarital sex was considered rather normal and therefore was not harshly punished.

As a matter of fact, sexual prohibitions start at the moment of engagement, when

13. Ibid., 46–7.
14. Ibid., 53–4.

the two begin to belong to one another. Adultery is considered particularly heinous if it involves a married woman who has already children, since it is believed that this sin can provoke their death. The Mentawaian traditional "jurisprudence" lists penalties for different cases of illicit sex. No sanctions will be inflicted on an unfree man (married or engaged) who has a relationship with a free woman. A free man who has sex with a woman already engaged or married will be punished by her boyfriend or husband. The husband or engaged man will be punished by his wife's or fiancée's family because of the shame brought upon them. Adultery with a married woman results in heavy sanctions for the man, who is compelled to pay almost as much as the dowry he would give for taking her as his wife. According to Caissutti, it can also happen that the husband encourages his wife to have sex with another person, just to get what he wants from fining him. If a married man commits adultery, then he has always to pay sanctions, but his wife will also demand payment from the women who had tempted her husband. The sanctions can be particularly heavy if adultery involves a woman who already has children, who belong to her husband and whose life is put at risk by the wrong behavior of their mother.

Generally speaking, the Mentawaian marriage is stable and not easy to break up. This fact sounds a bit strange if we think that the Mentawaian marriage is normally not based on love and romantic feelings, as we have seen before. Someone says that the Mentawaians do not get married because they love each other, but they love each other because they have married. In fact, divorce is possible but not easy, most probably because of the complex system of the exchange of dowry and gifts between the two families at time of wedding. However, the couple can divorce for many reasons and in different ways. The first one is the consensual divorce, which occurs when the couple is not granted offspring. So, the absence of children can undermine the stability of marriage, as commonly happens in Batak culture (Northern Sumatra). In this case, divorce is "celebrated" by eating together, and then the husband takes his wife back to her father. She can take home some of the goods that she has brought with her when she got married. The dowry still belongs to her original family. In some other cases, the sterility of the couple can be overcome by adoption, in which case the child becomes in all respects a member of the new family.

Divorce can also occur because of a conflictual situation in which one of the two is convicted of serious misconduct. Normally this happens because the husband considers his wife not able to fulfill all her duties. In this case, she has to leave, bringing with her only the goods she brought from her family, but she must give back the dowry. Another occurrence behind the conflictual divorce is the suspicion of infidelity. Since such violation is considered almost as serious as a homicide, because it puts her children' lives at risk, the sanctions can be very severe and her father is compelled to give back the dowry he had received at the time of wedding. In the past infidelity was also punished with physical sanctions, such as mutilation or wounds that provoke permanent scars, so that the woman would be labelled forever and then not be able to get married anymore.[15] In

15. Ibid., 55.

the case of divorce which is not consensual, the children will be given to the husband, since they are considered his property. Only if the child is still breastfed it is entrusted to her as long as it is necessary. If divorce occurs when the woman is pregnant, the baby will be given to her.

In daily life women are more active in work than their husbands. Children are generally entrusted to women's care, if not to their elder siblings. The wife wakes up earlier, cooks for the family and then goes fishing to the river. This activity is hard work, especially because fishing is performed staying in the water for hours, since the fishing technique makes use of simple nets operated by hand. The wife is also the one who takes care of the fields, cultivate taro, cassava etc. So, everyday life is rather busy and repetitive for women. The routine is only broken by clan parties, death and healing celebrations. On the other hand, the Mentawaian man is in charge of the production of sagu flour,[16] which is an occasional but complex task and it takes more or less one month's work.[17] The man also fishes and hunts. He is also the one who builds the house, makes boats (the Mentawaian canoes are hollowed wood trunks, manually carved), and feeds the pigs (the number of pigs is the main wealth indicator in the Mentawaian culture; moreover, pork is a fundamental element of parties and celebrations). The man maintains public relationships and normally is the one in charge of leading ceremonies. The Shamans are generally men, but in some cases also women can be involved in healing rituals.

Although the Mentawaian concept of marriage does not differ much from that of other cultures in Indonesia, in some way the position of the woman is rather particular. Caissutti points out that the girl has the chance to express her opinion regarding her future husband, so at time of betrothal, she is the one who finally accepts or refuses the boy proposed by her father. It is well acknowledged that if she marries someone she does not like, the marriage is put at risk of divorce, or the girl may experience abuse. An unhappy life can provoke diseases or even death. Moreover, the husband does not have absolute dominion over his wife. He does not have the power of life and death over her, as it is in other cultures (like in Nias island), but he cannot even treat her badly. In case of abuses and mistreatments, the wife can rely on the protection of her original family that can fine the husband or, as a last option, can take her back home. Another point is that if the husband dies, the widow does not automatically become the property of the husband's family, but she goes back to her father's place. This prevents the widow from becoming a sort of slave or property of the husband's family, burdened with the most uncomfortable and heavy work. For this reason, she does not automatically marry her husband's brother. In fact, this is also possible, but the procedure will be the normal one as it would be with any other man. For all these reasons, we can say that the Mentawaian woman is a free person who can, to a certain degree, decide her destiny. This is why Mentawaian women

16. Sagu is a starchy palm tree from which the Mentawaians obtain flour, which represents the primary component of their daily diet.

17. See T. Caissutti, *La cultura mentawaiana*, op. cit., 127.

believe that their dignity is better upheld in their cultural milieu compared to what they could experience in other cultures.[18]

The Javanese Family

The Javanese represent the most influential cultural pattern in Indonesia, since they are the largest ethnic group (41.71%) within the Archipelago. Moreover, its broad influence is also a consequence of the transmigration plan implemented firstly by the Dutch colony and then on a larger scale by Suharto's Government during the 1970s and 1980s. Its aim was to move a large number of Javanese families to less populated areas, due to the overpopulation of Java[19] and also with the purpose of a gradual "Javanisation" of the Country.

The Javanese is a very profound system of values and beliefs, which has a strong influence on social and familial relationships. Unfortunately, it seems that not many studies have been conducted on this topic, so that the book which is still consulted as an authoritative reference is *Keluarga Jawa* (The Javanese Family) by Hildred Geertz, who studied the culture of Central Java at the end of the 1950s. Nevertheless, it must be said that, to a certain extent, the picture taken 50–60 years ago still maintains its validity at present, especially in the rural areas of Java. For this reason I will give a description of the traditional Javanese family mainly referring to this book.[20]

Within the traditional Indonesian cultures, the individual finds his own place within the complexity of human relations. It seems that the perception of the self is, to a certain extent, the perception of a collective-self, where the individual is firmly inserted within a communitarian framework. The self-identification of the individual occurs primarily within the collective context of the family, as the smallest and most fundamental cell that constitutes social life; it then extends beyond the boundaries of the immediate family to the extended family and to the surrounding society. This process goes along with the acquisition of a set of appropriate behaviors, attitudes and habits that will help the individual to live harmoniously in his cultural environment.[21]

In Java, every person learns how to establish relations with others according to social class (*priyayi*, *santri* or *abangan*),[22] status, wealth, age and sex. Belonging to a particular position within society is determined by fate, and then one's status is accepted with res-

18. Ibid., 56.

19. Java is the island with the highest population density in the world. Some data on population in Indonesia can be seen at <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/indonesia–population/>.

20. H. Geertz, *Keluarga Jawa* (Jakarta: Grafiti Pers, 1983).

21. See N. Moulder, *Mysticism in Java. Ideology in Indonesia* (Kanisius: Yogyakarta, 1998), 69.

22. According to the classical categorization proposed by Clifford Geertz, the traditional Javanese society is divided into three main social components, namely: 1) the *abangan*: those who embrace Islam but are still syncretically tied to the beliefs of *Kejawen* religion, that has its roots in Hindu and Buddhist backgrounds; 2) the *santri*: those who are loyal to orthodox Islam; 3) the *priyayi*: the aristocracy, who preserves the Javanese Hindu–Buddhist mystical traditions and etiquette. See C. Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 5–7.

ignation and submission. According to the Javanese belief, people "are born unequal, so one's destiny must be accepted as it is."[23]

Relationships among people are based on the principle of *hormat* (respect) which is expressed by particular behavior and use of the language. The first thing a Javanese thinks when talking to someone, is which position he or she has to take according of the interlocutor's status. For this reason, a person is never addressed by pronouncing his or her own name right away. The way of addressing a person and also the language chosen for communicating always indicate his or her position in relation to the counterpart. As an example, a mature man called Budi, will be addressed by a younger person "*pak* Budi" where "*pak*" stands for "sir" or "father." Conversely, calling him "Budi" would sound rather rude and inappropriate. Besides, the educated Javanese are expected to master three stages of the Javanese language in order to be able to handle conversation with people of different dignity. The most popular is the *ngoko* language, whilst the highest is the *krama,* which is used to express the highest respect. Other intermediary levels are the *krama inggil* (very respectful) *ngoko madya* (familiar but respectful), and the *krama madya,* that are the languages of the farmers or lower class citizens in cities.[24]

Within the family, communication always makes use of particular words and language that are meant to express the respective position of one compared to the others. A number of appellatives are used to define the respective hierarchical positions: *pak* (father), *bu* (mother), *mbakyu* (elder sister), *mas* (elder brother), *adik wedok* (younger sister), *adik* (younger brother). Uncles and aunts are called *pak de* and *bu de* (old father and mother) if they are older than one's parents. If they are younger, they will be called *pak lik* and *bu lik* (young father and mother). The use of these appellatives is extended to all relatives.[25] This is due to the fact that we can hardly find clear divides between the nuclear family and the extended one, so that all the relatives are considered linked to each other with bonds as strong as blood ties. This provides stability and harmony among the family members.

Children learn *ngoko* language up to the age of 10–12. Then, they start learning a more polite way of speaking (*ngoko madya*), even if they generally do not make use of *krama* language at home. *Krama* is very complicated also because it must be accompanied by a particular way of saying things, the so call *basa-basi*, namely a respectful way of talking which aims at avoiding anything that can hurt the interlocutor or make him disappointed. Thus, the word "no" will be expressed with circumlocutions which make the counterpart understand the denial without feeling offended. Any expression that can make one lose

23. N. Moulder, *Mysticism in Java. Ideology in Indonesia*, op. cit., 68.

24. Moulder states that "It is impossible to speak Javanese without reference to the position of the person spoken to in relation to the position of the speaker. In its many complicated and formal gradations, the choice of words reflects position, intimacy or formality, age, social distance and rank, together with all the nuances of relative expectations, obligations, and rights." N. Moulder, *Mysticism in Java. Ideology in Indonesia*, op. cit., 69. See also H. Geertz, *Keluarga Jawa,* op. cit., 24–5.

25. See Table I in H. Geertz, *Keluarga Jawa*, op. cit., 20.

face must also be avoided. Being so complicated, the *krama* language is therefore spoken only by the aristocracy (*priyayi*) when addressing the elderly or people of higher rank.[26]

The hierarchical structure of the family determines the way of expressing mutual respect among relatives, a respect that must be expressed by a particular way of communicating but also by deeds. Talking to an older brother or sister-in-law needs the *krama* level of language, whilst the daughter in law is always addressed using *ngoko*. Much respect is reserved to the father and the mother-in-law who also commonly receive gifts and are periodically visited by their sons or daughters' families. On the other hand, grandparents will offer gifts to their grandchildren. The grandparents are also given monetary donations by their children, and would be disappointed if their expectations were neglected. The respect due to the elderly minimize tensions which sometimes arise between them and their sons or daughters-in-law. On the other hand, conflicts are more luckily to occur between brothers or sisters-in-law, generating disagreements that can last very long before reaching reconciliation.

The traditional Javanese family begins preparations for their children's marriage very early. The girl is introduced to the idea of marriage after her first menstruation. In the past, she was even forced to get married very soon to prevent her from falling into immoral conduct, especially if she had already showed interest in boys. In former times, girls could get married at the age of 9 or 10 years, whilst at the time of Geertz's research in Central Java, at the end of 1950s, they usually got married at the age of 16 or 17, and the boys between 18 and 30. Nowadays, the higher education level has shifted the age of marriage, which generally takes place over the age of 18.

Traditional marriage is basically arranged involving the two families. The choice of the partner is done by the boy, who declares to his parents his readiness to get married letting them know the girl he likes. Nevertheless, it is rather common that the boy simply accepts his parents' choice. In fact, choosing the partner is not as simple as it appears and is not only a matter of desiring someone with whom to live. As a matter of fact, in the Javanese context, different factors must be taken into consideration in making this choice, like the respective economic condition, religion, social status and rank. An extreme social disparity can eventally create problems within the couple. On the other hand, marrying a person of very low social status will be considered humiliating by the family of the higher class counterpart. The Javanese tradition forbids incestuous relationships, but in some cases, it is possible to have a marriage among cousins, as well as between children of the same mother but of different fathers. Endogamic marriages of this kind are more common among the *priyayi* (aristocracy) than among other social classes. Finally, the choice of the partner depends also on Javanese horoscopy, which is performed by experienced people believed to have the ability to forecast the couple's future life together. Such predictions are calculated on the birthdate of the two, which are believed to have a strong influence in shaping the character of people. It is in fact believed that marriage

26. Ibid., 24–6.

will work only if the two match perfectly (*jodo*) according to their characteristics. If the horoscope is not positive, then the marriage will not take place and the verdict is accepted with resignation.[27]

The preparation for betrothal, which usually does not last very long, includes three steps. Firstly, the boy's family ascertains the will of the girl's parents with the help of a common friend. Then, an informal meal provided by the girl's family ratifies the first contact between the two parties. On this occasion, improper or deliberately rude behavior on the girl's part becomes her unspoken message of refusal, but her opinion is rarely explicitly sought. Finally, the boy or his representative openly asks to marry the girl. This petition can be made in the context of a formal ceremony if the boy's family can afford the expenses. Otherwise, the same request can be done in a simpler way. Everything will be concluded at the moment in which the boy offers a gift to the girl as a sign of the agreement.

The traditional wedding consists of a number of celebrations and rituals which cannot be described here in detail. It will be enough to say that the main ceremony is generally preceded by the registration at the district office and by a prayer. Then the wedding is celebrated at the woman's family house with a rich meal and a party performed according to the Javanese tradition (*selamet*). Then wealthy families can add an optional ritual that symbolizes the meeting of the two (*ketemuan*). This ceremony expresses gratitude towards parents and the promise of the groom's dedication towards his wife; this is symbolized by the act of washing her feet. Everything concludes with a big feast which takes place in the bride's house.[28] Then, after the marriage, the new family usually lives near the wife's original family for some time. Once the financial situation of the new family has reached a satisfactory level, they move to a new place.

Having children brings happiness to the new family. Their presence commonly provides more stability to the young couple. Moreover, children will take care of their parents in their old age. Therefore, if the couple finds difficulty in getting offspring, the Javanese make use of particular techniques to improve fertility, such as massages or medicaments provided by medicine-men. It is also commonly believed that tranquility and avoiding stress can favor fertility. During pregnancy, the couple undergoes some taboos that encompass food (to prevent the baby from getting too big, or avoiding eating chili which can shock the child and facilitate diseases), sexual intercourse, and killing animals (it could provoke deformities). Since possession by the spirits is believed to occur more easily up to the seventh month, the mother is not allowed to go out of the house at night. Moreover, the mother must control her emotions because anger and bad feelings can affect the correct growth of the baby. Finally, giving birth usually takes place at home with the help of a midwife who knows the mantras necessary to protect the woman. Then the mother enters a recovery phase making use of massage and traditional medicaments. At

27. Ibid., 60–4.
28. Ibid., 68–72.

present the use of midwife is becoming less frequent, since childbirth usually occurs in hospitals.

Abortion is a rather rare occurrence for married women, but also unmarried girls usually carry on pregnancy. In the case of unwanted pregnancy, adoption becomes a preferable alternative to abortion and usually the baby is received by relatives. Nevertheless, the Javanese acknowledge three methods for obtaining abortion. The first one is by the use of natural medicaments, the second is by the recitation of particular mantras and the last is by the use of massage. Abortion is only allowed before the third month of pregnancy but it becomes a sinful act if it occurs after that point, which represents the time when the Javanese believe that a clump of blood in the womb becomes a human being. This understanding of the human genesis is probably taken from the Islamic tradition according to which the formation of fetus happens through a gradual process that lasts several weeks until an angel provokes the animation of the body.[29]

After the birth, one of the main obsessive worries is the constant possibility of possession of the newborn by evil spirits. It is for this reason that the baby must avoid scares and shocking situations and has to be treated tenderly. Parents try to avoid any kind of discomfort that can make their baby cry. The baby is breastfed up to the age of 2 years, but in some cases, this period can last even longer. To prevent possession by evil spirits, the child is carried everywhere by the mother, since it is believed that one of the main ways through which spirits enter the body is through the soles of their feet. For the same reason, the top of the baby's head is anointed with oil mixed with onion because the head is considered to be an entrance point for evil influences.[30]

The relationship with the mother is much closer and more intense than the one with the father. The mother is truly loved (*trisna*) as the primary reference figure for the child, whilst the father is loved at a lower degree (*seneng*). Actually, in Java the father is close and takes cares of his children, but basically the relationship with him is mostly mediated by respect and distance. He becomes the last refuge only if the mother gets angry. Therefore, the mother is the main reference point in parenting. The mother begins teaching etiquette and good manners to her children from their earliest years. It is when the baby is still unable to walk and is still carried by his mother that he learns from her the use of the right hand for taking things. It is she who inculcates the Javanese manners, politeness and values, such as *hormat* (respect)[31] and also the *basa-basi* attitude, namely the proper way of speaking that tends to avoid disappointing the interlocutor. Moreover, the child must learn three other basic Javanese concepts, that are: 1) *wedi*: fear of ghosts, spirits, or foreigners; 2) *isin*: the sense of shame that arises when facing uncomfortable

29. Ibid., 89–91.

30. Ibid., 98–110.

31. According to Geertz, the word "*hormat*" is normally translated by the word "respect", but this translation is less than satisfactory, because *hormat* does not necessarily express the inner esteem for the person one is talking to. One becomes the object of *hormat* merely because of his or her particular position in society (e.g. respect for a person of higher rank, for the wife, etc.).

situations (which curiously do not provoke apparent anxiety, but rather immobility); 3) *sungkan*: a typical Javanese attitude, namely the need to act politely, with humility and elegance, when one meets with a higher rank person or someone with whom one is not yet acquainted. The training to assimilate these values and regulations will last up to the age of 5 or 6. Before reaching that stage, the child will be regarded as "*durung Jawa*," that means "being not yet Javanese."

The atmosphere that surrounds the process of learning traditional values and conduct is the typical Javanese one, that tends to avoid any conflict and disorder that affect social harmony. For this reason, the child is educated in tranquility, and protected from facing shocking situations and stress. He will be corrected only if strictly necessary. His parents will not show anger but rather they will try to give advice and guidance kindly. If resorting to threat cannot be avoided, then it must be done gently making the child aware that violation of rules can bring painful consequences and misfortunes that will come from outside the familial milieu, which conversely preserves its function of protective shelter.[32]

Adoption of a son or a daughter from a brother's or sister's family is rather normal. The motives for doing so are of different kinds. It can happen that the adopting family does not have children, or may need them to help in domestic work. Another reason is to provide the child with better and a more favorable environment. Whatever the reason, the adopted child will be brought up by the new family and from then on, he or she will be considered to belong to his new parents. The relationship with the natural family gradually weakens. Basically, the child entrusted to the new family will be considered part of it in all respects and therefore it is difficult to distinguish true adoption from simple custody. This also means that the natural parents lose their rights over the child they have entrusted to their relatives. On the other hands, adoption of a child coming from outside the extended family is a rarer occurrence. Selling a child to another family can happen only if the parents are facing strong financial difficulties. In any case, the traumatic experience of separation from the natural parents leaves tremendous scars in the child's memory, also because adoption can occur at the age of 4 or 5. On becoming an adult, the child can be asked to take care of his or her natural parents, but the profound disappointment for having experienced the cutting of family ties will last forever and will be felt even in adulthood. It is not rare that the child addresses the mother as "auntie," whilst considers the natural aunt his or her real mother.[33]

32. Mulder states: "The mystical ideal of unity and harmony between man and 'God' stands as the model for the relationship between man and society. The quest for unity-harmony, and the maintenance of order, are the predominant elements. The idea of unity implies orderliness. Personal desires, ambitions, and passions are thought to endanger harmony, and thus it is thought that 'to sacrifice for the sake of social harmony will lead to the highest rewards': a person should give himself up to the community rather than try to impose his will" in N. Mulder, *Mysticism in Java. Ideology in Indonesia*, op. cit., 67. See also H. Geertz, *Keluarga Jawa*, op. cit., 116–20.

33. See H. Geertz, *Keluarga Jawa*, op. cit., 39–44.

The adoption system is not as smooth as it might appear. It is rather common that the parents will take care of their natural children more than of the adopted ones. This discriminatory behavior can produce profound and permanent wounds in adopted children. The same discriminatory attitude can also occur if two get married after a previous divorce and have brought their respective children into the new family. Most probably, each parent will take more care of his or her own offspring. For all these reasons, it is more common that the child is entrusted to his or her natural aunt, who would probably be more committed to taking care of her sibling's child.[34]

During adolescence, boys are more independent than girls. They can even have a little job and earn some money. Besides, the relationship of the boy with his father is usually rather difficult. The son respects his father, but communication among the two is limited to the strictly necessary. It is also common to see the father sitting on the veranda in front of the house, whilst the boy stays with his mother in the kitchen.

Regarding sexual life in adolescence, it is not surprising that a boy has already sexual experiences by the time he has become a teenager. Sex is considered to be a natural drive that cannot be easily controlled. Thus, it is no wonder if the boy has had sexual intercourse with prostitutes before marriage. On the other hand, it is rare to talk about sexual matters in the family, since this topic is considered to be taboo. If sexual experiences are more or less tolerated for boys, a girl's sexual life is more under the control of her family. Nevertheless, it is not impossible for a girl to have premarital sex experiences. Pregnancy occurring before marriage is not considered primarily as a moral violation, but rather as a practical problem to be solved, since it will be more difficult for the girl to find a boy willing to marry her.[35]

In the Javanese family, the couple has a clear distinction of duties. The men do the hard work in the fields, like ploughing, pulling carts, or carrying heavy burdens. Moreover, in the past, office work was reserved to men, while at present a higher level of education has opened the possibility of office work to women as well as men. Generally speaking, the wife has more work to do compared to her husband, especially if the children are still babies. Normally is the wife who takes care of them, whilst her husband spends his time chatting with friends. Nevertheless, the husband is rather dependent on his wife on both domestic and monetary matters. He is not able to keep the house, nor to cook. Besides, he hands over the money to his wife.

Furthermore, any important decision is normally taken by mutual consent so that, to a certain extent, husband and wife's positions reach the same hierarchical importance. Sometimes the wife can even dominate her husband. It is also possible that the wife inherits a small rice field or some goods to profit from, so that she can receive a small income out of her personal work. She can also have a little business like selling food at

34. Ibid., 44–7.
35. Ibid., 125–28.

the local market, whilst in town a woman can also become a teacher. From all of these activities the woman can achieve a relative economic independence.[36]

The role of the woman within the Javanese family seems to be very important. Geertz sees the mother as the main reference and source of harmony within the family. Whether in the nuclear or the extended family, it seems clear that relationships among all members are harmonized by the figure of the mother. Relations among the male components of the family, that is father and sons, or among brothers, are often tense and disharmonious. It is the mother who plays the role of harmonizer and who softens all contrasts. On the other hand, the difficult relationship among the male components of the family underscores the authority of the father compared to that of the mother. It is for all these reasons that Geertz draws the conclusion that the Javanese family is "matrifocal."[37]

As in other cultural contexts, also in Java loyalty within marriage can become a problem. We have already seen that sex does not have a strong moral valence. Therefore, having an extramarital relationship is not primarily seen as a sin, but rather as a wrong behavior that offends the partner, arouses his or her jealousy, and brings shame on the whole family. In general, husband and wife are suspicious of one another. They control each other. Generally speaking, husbands are less loyal than wives who normally conduct their lives in the more controlled domestic environment. Furthermore, men are familiar with *tayuban*, namely a leisure venue where they can meet with young dancers, who can occasionally become prostitutes. If the husband gets home late at night, his wife will know for sure that he is having an affair. On the other hand, married women can meet people at the market, but have less occasions for extramarital contacts. For them, even talking to a male neighbor is not easily permitted.

If an extramarital relation occurs only occasionally, the wife generally tolerates and forgives it. Such infidelity is commonly considered *kenakalan* (naughtiness), a disturbing behavior. However it does not always provoke dramatic consequences. Sometimes the betrayed wife even justifies her husband while blaming the woman with whom he has slept, holding her responsible for having lured the man. As a matter of fact, if the affair is still within the limits of secrecy, it will be tolerated, whilst it becomes a big problem if it becomes public knowledge. In this case, adultery brings shame on the family. Then, only two options will be left: divorce or stopping the extramarital relation. The rate of tolerance of infidelity depends also on the age of the couple. Generally speaking, adultery is less accepted by a young wife, whilst if it happens after years of marriage, the wife will be more keen to tolerate the infidelity of her husband. Furthermore, it must also be said that traditionally polygamy was not seen as solution to avoid extramarital relationships. During the 1950s only 2% of the Central Java weddings were polygamous. Having more wives is allowed by Islamic law, but it is rather complicated because the husband is compelled to treat his wives equally. It is possible that the low rate of polygamy was due to mere eco-

36. Ibid., 129–35.
37. Ibid., 47–9; 83.

nomic calculations in maintaining more than one wife, and respective children. On the other hand, as an alternative to official polygamy, it is also possible for a rich man to have secret wives in different places who do not know each other. Obviously, such relationships are not regulated by the Sharia.

It is quite surprising to acknowledge that at the time of Geertz's research on the traditional Javanese family, at the end of 1950s, the divorce rate was surprisingly high. Geertz draws the conclusion that almost half of the marriages in Java ended up in divorce.[38] This data is impressive, especially compared with statistics calculated at the turn of the twentieth century, showing that divorce tended to decrease through the years. This goes against the common assumption that divorce is necessarily the product of modernity and Western cultural influences.[39] The causes of divorce are of different kinds, among which the infidelity of the husband is more frequent. Such behavior is often due to boredom, so that the man looks for extramarital relations to find leisure and escape from the ordinary. On the other hand, it is rarer for the wife to abandon her husband and children. Another reason for divorce is the lack of responsibility regarding domestic duties. This is the case, for instance, of a spendthrift husband who puts the family at risk of bankruptcy. Divorce can also be caused by the intrusiveness of the extended families, which can influence important decisions that should be reserved to the couple. This often happens regarding financial issues or inheritance. Sometimes a couple who lives harmoniously can be drawn to divorce by the pressure put upon them by their relatives. This shows how blood ties can overtake marital bonds. Finally, the divorce can occur because the two do not love each other. This often happens in Java, since traditionally the marriage is arranged by the families and betrothal is usually too short for the couple to have the possibility of really knowing each other before getting married.

On the other hand, in the Javanese culture we can hardly find factors that can efficiently combat divorce. There is no monetary sanction; the wife can easily go back to her family; children can be entrusted to the families of husband or wife to be brought up. Moreover, divorce in an arranged marriage opens the possibility of marrying a person of one's own choice. Normally, after divorce, the wife can live alone and therefore she does not necessarily need to look for a new partner. Conversely, the husband will normally get married soon after divorce, as he is more dependent on a woman's support and less able to deal with domestic work.[40]

One of the main cultural elements that strongly affect the endurance of the marital bond in Java is the tendency to avoid any kind of disharmony. Relational conflicts and emotional disorders can provoke profound unhappiness and even diseases. Therefore, instead of facing anxiety, it is much better to leave each other, and simply to acknowledge

38. Ibid., 72–3.

39. Data on divorce rate in Indonesia can be found at <http://pta-yogyakarta.go.id/english/artikel/lawarticles/189-recent-divorce-trends-in-indonesia.html>.

40. See H. Geertz, *Keluarga Jawa*, op. cit., 144–51.

that fate had not ratified the matching of the two (*berjodo*). Rarely is divorce subsequent to an open quarrel or fight. As the sense of harmony (*rukun*) is so important, the two tend not to react emotionally, but rather to avoid arguing and fighting openly. In case of conflict, the normal reaction is not to quarrel but rather to avoid each other. The Javanese express such behavior with the word *satru*, that means keeping silent and avoiding meeting the counterpart in order to preserve peace and harmony. This behavior is helpful for escaping open infighting, but is not profitable at all for overcoming problems within marriage and for protecting the unity of the family. It seems paradoxical that the incredibly high divorce rate in Java is mainly due to the quest for harmony, a harmony that must be preserved at any cost. It becomes preferable to leave each other rather than trying to go through the difficult path of mutual understanding, achievement of truth and justice, and pursuit of the right solutions to problems. Instead of bearing the burden of the quest of a more profound unity, the Javanese concept of harmony can produce division within the family, a division that claims its victims, that in the end are the children, the weakest and least protected component of the whole familial system.[41]

THE INDONESIAN FAMILY FACING MODERNITY

Sociological studies on the Indonesian family still mainly refer to western literature.[42] If some similarities between the South East Asian context and the West are undeniable, nevertheless there are some local particularities that are inevitably overlooked by research conducted outside this cultural environment. For this reason, the results of western studies must be taken critically and contextualized within the Asian milieu. Moreover, the Indonesian social composition is not homogenous at all. It consists of urban, overpopulated, industrialized and modern areas, and also of traditional and underdeveloped areas in the countryside. Therefore, to speak properly about the influence of modernity on the concept of family, we must remember that the extension of the Archipelago, the variety of cultures, and the large social gaps between different areas, make the analysis too complex to be synthetized in a single comprehensive paradigm.

One of the main references for studies on family changes due to modernization is the theory of William Goode (1917–2003). According to some Indonesian scholars, to a certain degree, this theory seems to depict well the transformation of the concept of the Indonesian family too.[43] Goode sees that the main factor in the changing concept of family is the process of industrialization that started in Europe in the nineteenth century. Its main effect was the shift from the extended family model to the conjugal one. Through this process, the traditional extended family, the one that involves relatives in making

41. Ibid., 140–43; 153–60.

42. See T. O. Ihromi ed., *Bunga Rampai Sosiologi Keluarga* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia), VII–VIII.

43. See P. Tangdilintin, "Sekilas Perkembangan Kajian Keluarga Perkotaan" and T. O. Ihromi, "Beberapa Catatan Mengenai Pengkajian Keluarga dalam Masyarakat yang Berubah." In T. Omas Ihromi ed., *Bunga Rampai Sosiologi Keluarga* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor, 2004), 10–2; 286–88.

decisions, sharing goods and expressing solidarity in happy and sad happenings, loses its important role on the urbanized, industrial environment. The family experiences its boundaries restricted to the intimate relationship within the conjugal family, namely the two parents and their children. This new familial model becomes more and more autonomous and less affected by the pressure and influence of relatives. This independence is mainly due to the fact that the new family can easily reach economic self-sufficiency, and in some cases the new couple can become even richer than their respective parents.

In the conjugal family, the core relationship that represents the basis of the familial structure is love between husband and wife. This means that love and affection play a new central function in the modern family, whilst they are less determinant in strengthening the family unity in the traditional extended one. For this reason, the stability of marriage becomes strongly dependent on the quality of the relationship between the two. Lack of affection, an affective crisis, frustration, suspicion, can easily affect the unity of the couple and undermine its solidity. The modern marriage is not longer seen merely as a pledge between two families but merely a pledge between two people. This makes marriage a personal choice, but the marriage is less able to be protected by the extended family. On the other hand, the negative influence of the relatives, which sometimes can badly affect the couple's relationship, becomes less strong and can be more easily controlled by the couple. Besides, the nuclear family model seems to uphold individuality better than the traditional extended family model which focuses on the collective identification of the self. The person tends to think at him or herself mainly as an individual rather than as elements of the clan or of the familial group.

The conjugal model produces changes also in the upbringing of children. The traditional extended family tends to set up a more despotic educational pattern where rules, punishment and domination become the classic tools for parenting. Usually the relationship with the father becomes rather conflictual and based upon respect and fear, whilst love is considered a mere maternal attitude. On the contrary, in the conjugal model, parenting becomes more based on sharing positive values that are proposed and explained to the child, rather than imposed under the threat of sanctions. The implementation of a less dominating atmosphere must be obviously well managed to avoid excessive permissiveness.

This participatory pattern also affects the function of the woman, who becomes more involved in making decisions and takes on a more visible role within the family. The woman is more and more independent from the financial point of view too, and spends less time at home compared to women in the past. Her emancipation can therefore disturb the traditional share of duties and roles within the family, in which the male counterpart normally undertakes the dominant position.

Trying to summarize, if the positive contribution of Goode's and other western theories on the consequences of modernization, urbanization and industrialization on the concept of family is undeniable, they are not always able however to provide a correct picture of the family in the Asian context. According to Ihromi, Goode's theory, which

underlines the shift form the extended family model to the nuclear one, only partially describes the situation of the family in Indonesia, even in urban frameworks. The main criticism offered against this theory is the fact that in the Indonesian milieu, even in towns, the role of the extended family seems not to have completely lost its function, so that it still plays an important role in the modern familial dynamics. The intensity of extended family influence on the nuclear family depends on the cultural rules that are enforced within each cultural context. However, even in the present day, the Indonesian mentality is generally far from assuming that the extended family is a reality belonging only to the past. Therefore, it becomes normal to involve the extended family in discussing problems concerning the couple and in making important decisions. A Batak (Northern Sumatra) wedding celebrated in modern Jakarta (West Java) will be strictly performed following the rules of Batak tradition that establishes the list of relatives that must be invited and how to treat guests during the celebration according to their dignity. The extended network of relatives is also an important system of solidarity, especially for hospitality (even for long periods, for study or work) and when someone is facing financial problems. Many poor families receive monetary help from their relatives who live in richer urban environments.[44]

For all these reasons, although western studies on the trasformation of the concept of family are good references in the Indonesian context too, Ihromi draws the conclusion that, since Indonesia is facing a transitional phase towards modernity and has not yet completely abandoned its traditional cultural background, even in urban areas, then western analysis must be integrated with a more contextual approach which takes into account those social and cultural factors that help to surface the local and proper characteristics of such transformation.[45]

SOME SPECIFIC PROBLEMS

Divorce

The common assumption is that modernization brings about an increment of divorce rates. The stability of the modern nuclear family is built on the basis of love and communication between the two partners that give consistency to the marital bond. This means that the stability of marriage is directly dependent on the quality of love between the two. If the relationship is lacking in love and affection, then the nuclear family is more exposed to the possibility of disunion. At present, there are many factors that can facilitate divorce such as the little stigma put on divorce in modern cultures, the economic independence of women, and laws which make it easy to obtain divorce. Nevertheless, it must also be

44. See T. O. Ihromi, "Beberapa Catatan Mengenai Pengkajian Keluarga dalam Masyarakat yang Berubah," in T. Omas Ihromi ed., *Bunga Rampai Sosiologi Keluarga,* op. cit., 296–98.

45. Ibid., 292.

said that even in the past society generally used to accept divorce if the couple were not able to save their marriage. Moreover, Islam does not forbid divorce too, although such a decision must normally be pondered very well as *extrema ratio,* when living together can no longer be endured. Islam normally permits divorce if the petitioner is the husband, whilst the same opportunity is not so easily consented to his wife.[46]

Some studies indicate that at present the causes of divorce are mainly due to the different perspectives on the proper duties between husband and wife. Normally it happens that the wife's expectations on the marriage get frustrated because she cannot fully express her potentialities. For instance, it can happen that the woman gets disappointed because she is not allowed to pursue her own career and have a personal job. This means that men are generally not yet prepared to face the reality of their wives' emancipation. Another factor that may trigger divorce is the lack of communication within the couple due, for instance, to the frequent absence of the husband because of his work. This situation may give way to the entrance of a third person who can undermine the fidelity of the couple. Normally, the presence of offspring gives more stability to the family, but it is not able to completely prevent divorce in the case of crisis.[47] Once the situation has become unbearable because of lack of communication or even violence, divorce becomes the way to escape from this stressful situation. Even the children normally admit that the separation of their parents is preferable to the tense atmosphere of disharmony or domestic violence. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that divorce will deeply hurt them, producing deep scars difficult to heal. Furthermore, children are not always aware of the disharmony that is experienced by their parents, and therefore they are shocked when they discover it. They are also brought into the conflict by their own parents, who unconsciously tend to make use of them as tools for defending themselves or for attacking the partner. Finally, the children of divorced couples can lose emotional stability and often feel deeply ashamed in front of their peers.[48]

The conviction that modernity brings about the rise in divorce rates can be easily verified in different places, especially in the West. Even in Indonesia, it is usually assumed to be so, both in an urban context like Jakarta and in rural areas. One example is the case of Mentawai where a more modern way of thinking and experiencing marriage has provoked a relative increase in divorce rates. Nevertheless, if in European and North American contexts the correlation between modernity and increasing rate of divorce is indisputable, this is not always confirmed in the Asian and African contexts. According to Karim, in Japan the nuclear family has shown to be more durable since the 1920s compared to the earlier traditional model. In Islamic Algeria, divorce rates started

46. The conditions that allow the wife to ask for divorce can be found at <http://www.konsultasisyariah.com/kapan-wanita-boleh-gugat-cerai/>.

47. See G. Sri Tresnaningtias, "Perubahan Nilai di Kalangan Wanita yang Bercerai." In T. Omas Ihromi ed., *Bunga Rampai Sosiologi Keluarga,* op. cit., 182–87.

48. See E. Karim, "Pendekatan Perceraian dari Perspektif Sosiologi." In T. Omas Ihromi ed., *Bunga Rampai Sosiologi Keluarga,* op. cit., 156–65.

decreasing after 1940 with the advent of modernization. This means that new values and ways of thinking brought by modernity do not always increase the instability of family life. On the contrary, although autonomy from the extended family and building marital bonds on love can make the family more exposed to the risk of disunity, some new factors such as a better quality of communication between the spouses, a higher level of education, the older age of marriage, freedom in choosing the partner, autonomy from negative influences of the extended family, can provide more stability to marriage.[49] As we have seen above, this trend has been confirmed in Java. Statistics collected during the 1950s reported that the divorce rates in Central Java could reach 50%. At present, such an unsuccessful outcome has already improved.[50]

Family Planning and Abortion

In the traditional context, having a large number of children is considered to be a blessing from God. Having children means assuring the continuation of the father's name for the next generation, keeping the family inheritance within the confines of the family, and strengthening the marriage bond. The presence of children is also a source of happiness for the parents and relatives, is guarantee of caring during old age, symbolizes fertility and virility, increases the status of the parents, and also means the availability of a labor force in the fields for the welfare of the whole family. A childless family is normally considered incomplete and in some cultures such condition can even trigger divorce. The husband will look for a new wife, hoping to obtain offspring, as can occur in the Batak culture of Northern Sumatra. Conversely, the passage to modernity commonly brings about the decrease in the number of children in the nuclear family. Some factors behind this trend are: trying to escape from parental responsibility, pursuing more enjoyment from the marriage, women's careers, financial advantages, campaigns against demographic growth, disliking children, doubting the ability to bring up children well, and being afraid of the social environment in which the children would grow up.[51]

Being concerned with demographic growth, the Indonesian Government from the 1970s started a campaign on family planning, promoting the family composed of parents and only two children as the ideal domestic model, for the sake of happiness and welfare. This effort to reduce the population growth has basically focused on the use of contraceptives and implementation of programs of sterilization. There is no consensus among the big Islamic movements on the theme of family planning. The Muhammadiyah forbids birth control, except in the case of danger for the mother's life, as Islam forbids preventing pregnancy. The Nahdlatul Ulama seems to be more permissive, allowing family planning

49. Ibid., 137–41.

50.See H. Geertz, *Keluarga Jawa*, op. cit., 72–3. Some data on the divorce rates in Indonesia can be found at <http://pta-yogyakarta.go.id/english/artikel/lawarticles/189-recent-divorce-trends-in-indonesia.html>.

51. E. Suleeman, "Hubungan-hubungan dalam Keluarga." In T. Omas Ihromi ed. *Bunga Rampai Sosiologi Keluarga* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor, 2004), 106–08.

except for the use of abortion, with the aim of reducing the frequency of pregnancies and pursuing family welfare.[52]

The governmental promotion of birth control has raised concerns within the Catholic Church as well. As a matter of fact, many Catholics are rather unaware of the moral teachings of the Church on this matter, and make use indiscriminately of contraceptives just following governmental advice. The Indonesian Bishop's Conference published a directory on familial pastoral matters in 2010 that follows a former document on the same topic issued by the same Conference in 1972. The new directory states that the Church accepts family planning as an effort to build up the family on the basis of the responsibility of both husband and wife, aiming at the good of all its members. Therefore, the Christian vision on family planning goes beyond the mere limitation of childbirth. The same document also asks pastoral ministers to accompany families on this path. At the same time, the Church reaffirms the legitimacy only of natural methods for family planning, as means to achieve responsible parenthood, whilst refusing contraceptives, sterilization, or abortion. Furthermore, the Church is aware that the law of graduality is necessary in accompanying Christian families towards the full understanding and practice of moral principles related to the family.[53]

Even though that voluntary pregnancy interruption is forbidden by law, data on abortion in Indonesia are impressive. Every year more than 2 million abortions occur. This is even more surprising if compared to the five million babies born every year. The 2011 annual report of the National Commission for the Protection of Children (Komnas Perlindungan Anak) states that 62% of those who undergo abortion are minors. Since abortion is forbidden in most cases, many young women undergo illegal abortions in unsafe and unhealthy conditions, putting their own safety at risk.[54]

The Indonesian law issued in 1946 forbids abortion, but a new law entered into force in 2009 and a Governmental Decree issued in 2014 have introduced less restrictive regulations. Therefore, at present abortion is allowed within 40 days of pregnancy, but only under several conditions: 1) pregnancy that puts the mother's life at risk; 2) pregnancy which endangers the mother's health (but the degree of danger is not specified); 3) danger for the fetus' life; 4) danger for the fetus' health; 5) serious fetal genetic diseases or handicaps, and illnesses that can make the baby's life difficult after birth. These conditions expressed in the last Decree broaden the possibility to easily resort to abortion. Both eugenetic selection of children and suppression of handicapped and ill babies seem to be permitted by these regulations. Moreover, Indonesian law has also introduced the pos-

52. A. Nurcholish and S. R. Faturi, eds, *Seksualitas, Agama dan Kesehatan Reproduksi* (Jakarta: ICRP and Hivos, 2015), 141–42.

53. Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia, *Pedoman Pastoral Keluarga* (Jakarta: Obor, 2010), nn. 57–67.

54. Data on abortion reported by the National Commission for the Protection of Children (Komnas Perlindungan Anak) between 2008 and 2011 can be found at <https://komnaspa.wordpress.com/2011/12/21/catatan-akhir-tahun-2011-komisi-nasional-perlindungan-anak/>. See also A. Nurcholish and S. R. Faturi, eds, *Seksualitas, Agama dan Kesehatan Reproduksi,* op. cit., 152–53.

sibility of abortion for victims of rape. The woman who refuses to continue pregnancy as a result of rape can resort to abortion before the limit of 40 days. This regulation sounds rather odd, because it inflicts punishment on the innocent baby rather than on the perpetrator of the crime. Besides, it does not consider that abortion does not lessen the suffering of the woman, who on the contrary is exposed to an additional sense of guilt as a result of the suppression of the fetus in her womb.[55] Therefore, another approach should be put into action in order to help the victim of such a crime, providing counseling and psychological help, and giving also the possibility of placing the newborn baby in an orphanage if the mother is unable to parent him or her.[56]

The other odd thing is the time limit of 40 days which apparently does not rely on any medical consideration, but rather on religious assumptions. As a matter of fact, the 2014 Governmental Decree inserts into the national law the Council of Ulema's 2005 fatwa on abortion.[57] This regulation has two main references. The first one is the Quran itself. In al-Mu'minum [23]:12–14 is found an explanation of the gradual formation of fetus within the womb. According to this explanation, only at the end of this process does the fetus become a human being. The other source that becomes reference for the fatwa is the Hadith, namely the tradition of sayings and deeds of the Prophet. According to the Hadith belonging to the tradition of Imam al-Bukhari and Muslim, the complete formation of the fetus occurs in 120 days. This process finds its completion at the time when Allah sends an angel who pronounces the decision of the Creator on the baby's destiny, future deeds, wealth, death and joys and sorrows. Then the angel breathes into the fetus his spirit (*ruh*) transforming it into a new human being. Therefore, according to this religious assertion, human life starts exactly at the time of 120 days. Another Hadith states that the angel is sent by Allah before this. It is at the 40th day that the angel approaches the fetus to whom he gives shape, hearing, sight, skin, flesh and bones, besides uttering his or her destiny. Therefore, according to this tradition, human life starts after 40 days.[58] Finally, it must be also said that not all Islamic Ulemas and scholars agree on permitting abortion. Imam al-Ghazali (1058–1111) forbids abortion from the moment of conception.[59]

55. Another curious thing is that according to the MUI fatwa on abortion, the word "rape" is explained as "*perzinaan yang terpaksa*", namely "forced adultery." It looks like the Ulemas do not acknowledge the woman as victim of violence, whilst they only put their blame on the fact that sex took place outside marriage. Rape is therefore considered sin not mainly because of its significance as violence against a human being, but rather because it merely represents the infringement of a moral rule. See Magelis Ulama Indonesia, *Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia no. 4 Tahun 2005, Tentang Aborsi*.

56. See C. B. Kusmaryanto, "Menanggapi Peraturan Pemerintah Rl No. 61 Thn 2014 tentang Kesehatan Reproduksi: Aborsi," *Buletin Keluarga*, Edisi III/September-Desember 2014, 6–28.

57. This is also a good example on the attempts of introducing Islamic Law within civil law in Indonesia.

58. See Majelis Ulama Indonesia, *Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia no. 4 Tahun 2005, Tentang Aborsi*. This idea of the gradual formation of the human being is similar to the Aristotelian concept of "late animation" that was also propounded by Thomas Aquinas. Nevertheless, Thomas Aquinas forbids the abortion from the moment of conception, considering abortion before 40 days a "quasi-murder." See C. B. Kusmaryanto, "Menanggapi Peraturan Pemerintah RI no. 61 Tahun 2014 tentang Kesehatan Reproduksi: Aborsi," op. cit.

59. A. Nurcholish and S. R. Faturi, eds, *Seksualitas Agama dan Kesehatan Reproduksi*, op. cit., 180–84.

Role of the Woman in the Family

The phenomena of urbanization and industrialization that, to a certain degree, are transforming the Indonesian sociologic framework have a deep impact on the role of the women within society and family. According to Raho, this change is primarily due to the fact that the woman now is more and more an important player in industrial production.[60] Modernity has brought about the involvement of women as laborers in industry, as office employees and as business women. This has, of course, its consequences. It means, for example, there is less time available to take care of children and family; but it also indicates a new awareness of personal rights for many women and motivation for higher education.

Another important change produced by modernity is the new equilibrium between the respective roles of husband and wife, which are becoming more equalitarian and based on the awareness of the same dignity of all human beings, men and women. At present, submission of the wife to her husband is felt to be less acceptable than in the past. The wife works and has her own income just as her husband has his, and therefore she claims to be recognized with the same dignity. Furthermore, normally women have a more intense emotional closeness to their children and spend more time at home compared to men. This means that the authority of the mother is in some way higher than the father's, at least in parenting matters. Therefore, women claim that decisions must be taken together, especially if they concern the children's upbringing.

Especially in urban contexts, another element of change relates to the educational function played by the family and in particular by the mother. The family has the function of teaching all the norms and values that will help the child to adapt to society, and normally this task is accomplished mainly by the mother. Therefore, in the traditional family, she is the main agent of education and socialization. Conversely, in the urban areas, since the mother is out of the house for many hours a day, other entities take over this important educational role.[61] Kindergarten, schools, media, peer groups, replace the function of the mother in teaching values and norms that can help the child to fit in the society. A new emerging phenomenon is the influence of media, the Internet, and social networks on teenagers and youth. The use of these tools is transforming the way of communication of new generations, bringing about consequences for the future that are difficult to foresee at the moment.[62]

60. See B. Raho, *Keluarga Berziarah Lintas Zaman: Suatu Tinjauan Sosiologis* (Ende: Nusa Indah, 2003), 148–51.

61. Especially in Jakarta is rather frequent that both parents leave home at 5 A.M. and come back at 21.00 P.M., due to traffic and distances.

62. According to a study of Yayasan Pengembangan Anak Indonesia done in 2006, Jakarta children spend on the average 7 hours a day using the media (TV, computer or videogames). See S. Tay and I. Listiati, "Berteologi dengan Benar, Baik, dan Indah di Gemerlap Kota Metropolitan." Paper for the Seminar "Berteologi di Kota Metropolitan," Cathedral, Jakarta, 28 February, 2015.

The evolution of the role and vision of women in society and family, does not necessarily correspond to a change in male mentality. Emancipation of women and the claim for equal dignity do not always match with the will of men who generally tend to stick to the traditional and patriarchal view of women. Inheritance is still passed down to male line in several cultural contexts. Authority within the family and also the ability to lead ritual ceremonies are still firmly held by men. For this reason it is very important to have male descendants. One example among others is the Bali tradition in which, if there is not male offspring to continue the father's authority, the family is compelled to adopt a male child or to give male status to one of the daughters.[63] The idea of the woman whose places are only "*kasur*, *dapur dan sumur*" (bed, kitchen and well) is still, to a certain extent, the common vision on the functions of women within the family. It is clear that the male counterpart shows a resistant attitude in allowing to women their autonomy and emancipation. In the end, men do not want to see their privileges shared with their partners. They fear that the familial structure can be badly affected by giving power to women. In this respect, something similar happens in the political realm, where many criticisms are still propounded by Islamic fundamentalists if a woman is appointed as political leader or high rank governmental functionary.[64]

This means that the emancipation of women in the Indonesian context still has a long way to go to bring equality and justice between sexes. The National Commission on Violence against Women (*Komnas Perempuan*) has reported for year 2014 almost 300.000 cases of violence perpetrated against women. Obviously, this data refers only to the cases that have been officially collected by the Commission, which perhaps represent only the tip of the iceberg of this social disease. Besides, another data to be concerned with is the huge number of cases of domestic violence (68% of the total), a surprising data that shows how the family is not the safest place for women in Indonesia.[65] Domestic violence is also often kept secret and even when brought to the surface, it rarely receives the attention it deserves. The common mentality is that, since domestic violence is a business confined within the intimate relationship between husband and wife, one should not intervene from outside. Therefore, those who get to know such situations do not report it to the police. Violence within the family is oftentimes justified as something licit, since, according to the common understanding, the wife should submit to her husband. Moreover the woman is easily blamed as the cause of conflict, and so she is victimized twice. Often she is accused of not caring for her husband, of not carrying out her duties as a good wife,

63. See T. Istri Putra Astiti, "Nilai Anak dalam Kehidupan Keluarga Orang Bali." In T. Omas Ihromi ed. *Bunga Rampai Sosiologi Keluarga* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor, 2004), 226–32.

64. T. Omas Ihromi, "Beberapa Catatan Mengenai Pengkajian Keluarga dalam Masyarakat yang Berubah." In T. Omas Ihromi ed. *Bunga Rampai Sosiologi Keluarga* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor, 2004), 293–94.

65. According to the report, 68% of the cases of violence against women are perpetrated within the family or the circle of personal relationships, so that the victims are: wife, fiancée, daughter, former fiancée, former wife, or maid. See Komnas Perempuan, "*Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan: Negara Segera Putus Impunitas Pelaku*." Annual Report on Violences towards Women 2014 of Komnas Perempuan, Jakarta, March 6, 2015, 1,7,15.

and of other offences in order to justify the violent reaction of her husband. Husbands still think that they can possess their wives as personal goods, and that they have the right to sanction them even by using physical violence.[66]

The same Komnas Perempuan Annual Report puts the spotlight on marital rape as a form of domestic violence of great concern. Even within their own family, women are forced into sexual intercourse against their will and become submitted to their husbands' domination. They are forced to have sex even when for psychological, physical, or health reasons they would refuse it. In other cases they dislike the way of performing sexual acts according to their husbands' wishes. Therefore, sexual enjoyment is often reached only by the male partner, whilst the wife does not. Conversely, as victims of abuse, women feel their dignity has been violated: they become mere objects of exploitation, domination, and sexual satisfaction.[67]

The strange thing is that marital rape and other kind of sexual abuses within marriage are often justified by cultural and religious assumptions that affirm that the woman has the non-negotiable duty to "serve" her husband under any circumstances. To justify such assumptions some refer to religious texts. A Hadith says that a woman that refuse to serve (satisfy) her husband for any reason will be punished by the angels. The Quran, in verse al-Baqarah [2]223 says: "Your wives are a place of sowing of seed for you, so come to your place of cultivation however you wish."[68]

These texts, as well as others, are taken to strongly support the patriarchal mentality that provides a lower position to women compared to men and to justify the husband's dominion over his wife. Islam has a big task to accomplish in formulating a new interpretation of controversial statements taken from the Quran and other religious sources in order to build a new egalitarian understanding of the relationship between husband and wife. Some efforts have already been attempted by feminist and progressive Islamic exponents who state that Islam had an important function in freeing women from the condition in which they were imprisoned in the Jaliyah pre-Islamic society, a condition in which women were not considered human beings, but merely things to be traded to become the property of their husbands.[69]

CONCLUSION

After this overview on the evolution of the concept of the Indonesian family, we can conclude that it is impossible to find only one pattern. Since the reality is so complex

66. See N.H. Elli ed., *Derita di Balik Harmoni* (Yogyakarta: Rifka Annisa Women's Crisis Center, 2001), 6–11.

67. See B. Raho, *Keluarga Berziarah Lintas Zaman: Suatu Tinjauan Sosiologi,* op cit., 98.

68. See also A. Nurcholish and S. R. Faturi, eds., *Seksualitas, Agama dan Kesehatan Reproduksi,* op. cit., 102; M. Husein, "Islam dan Kesehatan Reproduksi." In Ibid., 110–16; M. Mulia, *Mengupas Seksualitas. Mengerti Arti, Fungsi dan Problematika Seksual Manusia Era Kita* (Jakarta: Opus Press, 2015), 108–20.

69. M. Guntur Romli, *Islam tanpa Diskriminasi. Mewujudkan Islam Rahmatan Lil Alamin* (Jakarta: Rehal Pustaka, 2013), 73–4.

and variegated, we can easily see that the Indonesian social setting has different familial models. This is enough to realize how different the family in Jakarta is from the one living in a small village in Mentawai or in another rural area of the Archipelago. The urban family gathers only during the weekend because parents and children are busy at work and school, and they can see each other only briefly during working days. Education of children is mostly entrusted to external agents, like kindergarten, school, and peer group rather than parents. Conversely, in rural areas the relationships within the family are close and frequent. Teaching values to children and the socialization process are performed primarily within the family itself.

Moreover, the modernization process that Western sociologist have researched starting from the industrial revolution in Europe, is only partially accomplished in the Indonesian context. As a matter of fact, the Indonesian reality is still in a transitional phase towards modernity. Instead, we are dealing with a mix of old traditions and modernity that has not yet found a definitive and stable fusion. In this reality, traditions influence very much the dynamics within the modern family. On the other hand, the family is challenged by the new reality of the modern world, like urban lifestyles, industrialization, and the emancipation of women. The media are also propounding new information, values (both positive and negative) and lifestyles. Moreover, the social and technological gap between prosperous and urban areas and underdeveloped territories makes the mix between tradition and modernity even more complex and different from place to place. Therefore, the family is going through a transitional process towards a new synthesis in which modernity and technological development will co-exist with traditional values.

Modernity and tradition have both positive and negative values to be taken into consideration. The past is not necessarily better than the present. Perhaps, this will be disappointing for those (many) who think that the old familial models were better than today's. Actually, there has never been a family's golden age. The traditional patterns were good in some aspects, but also weak in some others. It is enough to remember that the traditional family does not give enough space to love as the primary foundation of marriage, and we cannot also overlook the extremely high divorce rate within the Javanese society in the past. Then, if the traditional cultural background cannot be taken as source of positive values only, the same thing can be said of the new familial pattern created by modernity. Therefore, it would be wise neither to hope nostalgically the return of an imaginary model of family taken from the past, nor to idealize modernity as the source of only positive enrichments.

Perhaps, one of the keys to an evolution of the concept of family relies on the transformation of the vision of woman within family and society. The patriarchal image of woman that is rooted in the cultural traditions seems not to match any longer with the new awareness on human rights and the recognized equal dignity of all members of humanity. On the other hand, it seems that modernity too has not yet been able to provide full autonomy, emancipation and equal dignity to women. In some cases, it appears that, to a certain degree, the condition of women today may be worse than it was in the

past. Hence, the endeavor to acknowledge and give back full dignity to women must go ahead resolutely. We can only expect that a new consciousness of their equal dignity and mutual respect between husband and wife will bring fresh air to the family too, and will also provide positive fruit in the upbringing of children.

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Japan

Tiziano Tosolini

The widespread sense of crisis caused by declining birth rates, an aging society, transformation of gender roles in the workplace, decreasing economic growth, existential uncertainty about the future, and other factors, compelled experts to turn their attention to the phenomenon of the family. In some respects, this interest in the family was predictable: in every country the family structure is considered, not only the basic unity in which the values of a society are guarded and transmitted to new generations, but also the mirror that clearly reflects the changes within that society. In Japan these transformations were truly remarkable. Due to rapid social and economic changes, Japanese society moved from a family system based on the Confucian ethics of filial piety and obligations towards the head of the family (who was both in charge of the family property and responsible for the household), to a family structure in which the individual's relationships with the other family members, and the rest of the community, seem to have become unstable and problematic.

The purpose of this essay is to investigate the transformations taking place in today's family structure. We will begin by providing some terminological clarifications and show how different words designate different views and configurations of the family. We will then reflect on the demographic changes that have affected Japanese society (aging population, declining birth and marriage rates), paying particular attention to problems related to the family. The next chapter will take into account some of the problems afflicting the family (divorce, child abuse and domestic violence, *parasaito shinguru*, *hikikomori*, and the increasing phenomenon of homelessness)—problems which are attracting the attention (and concern) of sociologists, psychologists, educators, legal experts, and various social workers.

We will then analyze some of the laws issued by the government to counteract the negative consequences of these phenomena; in particular, we will focus on the suggestion of some scholars who tried to anticipate the structure of the future Japanese family. The study will close with an examination of the responses given by the Japanese Church to the questionnaire issued by the Secretariat of the Extraordinary Synod on the Family in preparation to the General Ordinary Assembly that will meet in 2015. These responses express the Church's preoccupation with the current situation of the family, as she urges Christian communities to become a welcoming haven for all those people who are affected by a precarious family life.

While this study emphasizes the "crisis" of the Japanese family, one should not forget that the institution of the family has regularly proved to be very flexible and resistant in the face of various historical and social changes. Thus, in the brief conclusive remarks of this essay, we will pause to consider the Japanese family, not as a declining entity, but as a system where one can witness the coexistence of continuity and transformation, assimilation and adaptation, stability and uncertainty.

TERMINOLOGICAL PREMISES

Experts in the social sciences believe that the most satisfactory definition of "family" is the one suggested by the anthropologist George Murdock (1897–1985). According to Murdock "the family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. It contains adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults."[1] This definition, while sufficiently broad and inclusive, seems nonetheless reductive when used to analyze the Japanese family; for the terminology used to describe the family in Japan is rather complex, and each term designates a very precise reality.

The term *setai* (世帯) refers to a family unit living in the same residence or "a group of people sharing a kitchen." The term simply indicates an association or a group of people

1. G. Murdock, *Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1949), 2.

living in the same residence; there are no close relations among the members of the group, although these are normally one's relatives.

The word *kazoku* (家族), habitually translated as "family," is used to indicate the domestic group composed almost exclusively of the members of one's family or one's closest relatives.

Katei (家庭) designates the "house," the place or residence where a family (*kazoku*) lives.

The term *ie* (家) has great historical and social importance. Often translated as "lineage" or "stem-family," the term is generally used by scholars to indicate the traditional Japanese family that was established during the Edo Period (1600–1868) and formally approved during the Meiji Period (1868–1912). The system and survival of the *ie* were guaranteed by patrilineal bonds between generations: the eldest son was usually responsible for the maintenance and continuation of the "main" household (*honke* 本家), while the other children would marry (thus becoming members of other families, as in the case of women) or leave the *honke* to establish secondary households (*bunke* 分家).

Several elements were peculiar to the *ie* system. First of all, it was internally regulated by a rigid division of roles strengthened by a hierarchical organization dependent on birth. This reflected the Confucian vision of society in which priority was given to the elders over the young, and to men over women.[2] Secondly, the *ie* system was characterized by a widespread practice of "adoption." If an *ie* had no children, or if none of the sons was considered suitable to become its head, the husband of one of the daughters could be requested to act as the head of the household and be fully adopted into the *ie*. When an *ie* had no male heirs, it was possible to adopt one, even if he had no kinship with the adopting *ie*. Thus, the fundamental feature of this system was the continuity of the family stock, and the relations among the members of the group were considered more important than any other relationship.[3]

The Meiji Civil Code of 1898 supported this family structure by stipulating that all Japanese had to belong to an *ie*, and promoted a system of identification based on family registers called *koseki* (戸籍). This system already had a longstanding tradition, but it was only under Meiji rule that it was declared universal, requiring every Japanese to have his or her name recorded in a family register. The family register contained the data of each

2. This hierarchical structure was also reflected in language usage: people of an inferior position used honorific speech when addressing someone of higher status. See on this T. Carroll, "Changing Language, Gender and Family Relations in Japan," in M. Rebick and A. Takenaka, eds, *The Changing Japanese Family* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 109–26.

3. For example, the status of one's wife and daughter-in-law, who came from other families, was incomparably higher than that of one's sisters and daughters, who married and moved into different families. If one's brother built a separate house, he would be considered part of a different family unit, while one's son-in-law, who once was a mere stranger, would become a member of the family and his status would surpass that of one's own brother. Duties and obligations toward one's brother living in a different family were now limited to the occasional exchange of greetings and gifts, participation in weddings and funerals, and providing special help in case of accidents and financial troubles.

individual in the family, as well as every change of status of its members. Each family unity was led by the *koshu* (戸主, or head of the family), who was not only in charge of the register, but also responsible for the management of all family affairs (including the choice of the partners for his children and the residence of the newlyweds).

Furthermore, men had undisputed priority in every aspect of family life and exercised rigid control over their wives who, being deprived of the juridical status of persons, had no rights. For example, the husband had the power to dispose of his wife's dowry, since women were considered incapable of managing any property or asset. The only cases in which a woman enjoyed paternal rights were when her husband died, abandoned his family, or became disabled.

In this family system, the purpose of marriage was to give continuity to one's lineage. In the selection of a wife, priority was given to the interest of the family, not to the will of the individual. Therefore, many marriages were arranged by relatives or family members. After getting married, the wife would become part of her husband's family: she would be included in the family register and would adopt the husband's family name. To be a good wife and a wise mother, to provide her husband with a male heir, and to satisfy every request of her mother-in-law were the qualities most sought-after in a woman. Even divorce was considered on the basis of its usefulness to the husband's family: if the wife was not in good relations with her husband's parents, or if she was unable to give the husband a male heir, she could be forced to request a divorce.

The formal dissolution of the *ie* was stipulated by the New Civil Code of 1947, which was founded on the principles of the dignity of the individual and the equality of the sexes. Now every family member had the same rights (at least theoretically), and primogeniture was abandoned in favor of equal succession rights for all the members of the family.[4]

The New Code supported and promoted a more democratic understanding of citizenship, establishing that laws pertaining to marriage and the family must be enacted "from the standpoint of individual dignity and the essential equality of the sexes" (Japanese Constitution, art. 24).[5] However, the practice of *koseki* did not undergo major changes: the data of every Japanese citizen, and his or her family, still had to be entered in a family register. To this day, individuals are required to record their name with a family, although

4. See E. Ochiai, *The Japanese Family System in Transition: A Sociological Analysis of Family Change in Postwar Japan* (Tokyo: LTCB International Library Foundation, 1997). Cf. also C. Ueno, *The Modern Family in Japan: Its Rise and Fall* (Melbourne: Transpacific Press, 2009), and A. Kato, "The Japanese Family System: Change, Continuity, and Regionality over the Twentieth Century," at <http://www.demogr.mpg.de/papers/working/wp-2013-004.pdf>.

5. Art. 24 in its entirety reads: "Marriage shall be based only on the mutual consent of both sexes and it shall be maintained through mutual cooperation with the equal rights of husband and wife as a basis. With regard to choice of spouse, property rights, inheritance, choice of domicile, divorce and other matters pertaining to marriage and the family, laws shall be enacted from the standpoint of individual dignity and the essential equality of the sexes."

the name must be removed and entered in a new register when the person gets married.[6]

For this reason, many have pointed out that, despite the improvements promoted by the New Civil Code, the new system of registration still reflects some of the ancient *ie* practices. To begin, the legal process of registration still seems to contain elements of subtle gender discrimination. Allison Alexy remarks:

> As in the historical *ie* system… women are much more likely to enter registers and to understand this movement in subordinated terms. In the *ie* system, because women were not allowed to begin a household themselves, nor remain in their parents' household after marriage, they were required to "enter" their husband's family. In the contemporary moment, although a single woman could legally have her own family register, a married couple must designate one family member the official household head and all household members legally take this person's last name. Although the law does not require this position be held by a male, in practice, over 98 per cent of current household are legally headed by men, thus creating a pattern similar to those in the legal *ie* system.[7]

Second, the (unwritten) law according to which the first born inherits the paternal house and is responsible for the duties traditionally belonging to the head of the family, including the care of his aging parents and of the small home altar, stands unchallenged. Finally, during the years before the bubble economy burst, companies were normally conceived as *ie,* whose employees were viewed as the members of one family headed by the company's boss. Underlying this conception was the idea that employer and employee were tied to a common destiny which transcended their merely contractual relation, and that this relation created a bond that was just as close as the bond among the members of the same household.

Despite the various terminologies used to describe the phenomenon of the family (*setai*, *kazoku*, *katei*, *ie*), it seems that Japan today is in the condition of having to redefine, or at least reformulate and rearticulate, its notion of family. A description of the modern family will have to account for couples without children, divorcees, monoparental families, adult children who refuse to leave home or do not intend to get married, elderly people who live alone or are entrusted to the care of social services or nursing facilities, and young people who have neither a regular job nor a salary (or are even homeless) and are unable to form new family units. Moreover, family life is increasingly viewed as a dysfunctional and temporary phenomenon rather than a harmonious and lasting form

6. It may happen, though not as frequently, that an individual begins a personal register before getting married.

7. A. Alexy, "The Door My Wife Closed. Houses, Families and Divorce in Contemporary Japan," in R. Ronald and A. Alexy, eds, *Home and Family in Japan: Continuity and Transformation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 247. See also Y. Sugimoto, *An Introduction to Japanese Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

of communal living. Furthermore, all these changes are taking place during an intense socio-economic transformation characterized by radical developments in demographics, declining birth rates, and a series of alarming social phenomena that contribute to an increased destabilization of the family structure. It is to some of these changes that we now turn.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

An Aging Society

One of the factors contributing to social change in Japan is its aging population. A person is commonly considered old at 64; if we accept this standard, the foreseeable data pertaining to Japan are quite alarming: the percentage of senior citizens will have risen from 4.9% in 1950 to 25.5% in 2020, and elderly people above 75 years of age, from 1.3% in 1950 to 16% in 2020.[8] Another significant number concerns the ratio between the economically active and economically inactive (mostly retired) population: 6:1 in 1990, 4:1 in 2000, and 2:1 in 2025. Furthermore, life expectancy in Japan is among the highest in the world: from 50 years for males and 54 for females in 1947, to 79 for males and 85 for females in 2003. The number of centenarians rose sharply from 3,625 in 1991 to 15,475 in 2001.[9]

The pressure of Japan's growing population on the resources of the family and of the entire country has become a recurrent theme in debates on social policy. Since the *ie* system dictated that the care of the elderly was a responsibility of the family, the State initially supported that system by giving families subsidies and incentives. But the situation in which elderly parents and their children formed a family unit is inevitably evolving from an "ideal" condition (in which parents and children lived together and shared the tasks and burdens of the family) to one that is more flexible and accommodating (in which each party respects the other's independence and provides assistance only when this is needed). First, this new family arrangement contributed to a new definition of the term "cohabitation," and second, it produced a new interpretation and perception of the time after retirement.

Concerning the first factor, cohabitation has gradually been replaced by the children's practice of living in separate homes, even though they remain not far from their parents. Thus, it is difficult to determine how many elderly people live in the situation traditionally described as "double households under one roof" (*ni setai jūtaku* 二世帯住宅) and how many live at a relatively close distance from their children—a distance referred to as "the distance within which soup does not cool down" (*sūpu no samenai kyori* スープの冷めな

8. S. Harada, "The Aging Society, the Family, and Social Policy." In J. Banno, ed., *The Political Economy of Japanese Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), vol. 2, 176.

9. *Asahi Shinbun*, 12 September, 2001. For a detailed analysis of demographic changes in Japan, see N. Ogawa, R. Retherford and R. Matsukura, "Demographics of the Japanese Family. Entering Uncharted Territory." In M. Rebick and A. Takenaka, eds, *The Changing Japanese Family*, op. cit., 19–38.

い距離). As a matter of fact, the expression "under one roof" seems to indicate three different kinds of residence: the first refers to two different family units (the elderly parents and their children) who live in the same building, but each with its own entrance; the second designates a residence with a single entrance but with two separate living areas within the same building; finally, the third refers to a house in which the two families share some areas (such as the kitchen and the living room) while other areas are private. Even if these kinds of residence do not strictly occur in the definition of "cohabitation," nevertheless they do not imply that the two families living under these conditions can be considered as two distinct family units, hence the necessity of clarifying the term *setai* and providing a correct classification or taxonomy of these new family arrangements.

We must also emphasize that the new arrangements are modifying the perception of the various ties which in the past had sustained and ruled the dynamics of the family. As Plaz writes,

> Japanese elderly today no longer rely on their children as main anchors for their lives after retirement. Instead the *de facto* obligations and preoccupations of children concerning their elderly parents have become rather theoretical and tend to concentrate on some time in the far future, when one parent dies or becomes seriously ill. These changes in the perception of family lead to new ways of organizing households and families. Aging parents, often upon consultation with their children, are imagining diverse possibilities for post-retirement, such as relying on friendship networks, sharing houses, and creating two generation households, and their plans are based on what is more suitable for each generation.[10]

Moreover, in the last twenty years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of services (both public and private) for the elderly, including home support and daily centers particularly aimed at alleviating the economic burden on the children. However, the percentage of individuals who need assistance and care, and are thinking of moving permanently into a rest home, or a residence for the elderly, is still relatively low: according to the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, 80% of people older than 64 (especially invalids, or widows/widowers) prefer to live with, or not too far from, one of their children.[11]

One final element concerns the various initiatives promoting "intergenerational interaction" (*sedaikan kōryū* 世代間交流). A 1998 study on the participation of the elderly in the life of the local community showed that only 50% of people over 60 had the opportunity to interact with individuals from the younger generation (with the obvious exception of relatives and family members). Thus, programs sponsored by local communities have been try-

10. A. Plaz, "Living Apart Together. Anticipated Home, Family and Social Networks in Old Age." In R. Ronald and A. Alexy, eds, *Home and Family in Japan: Continuity and Transformation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 254.

11. Data of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2008, at <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/wp/hakusyo/kousei/08/>.

ing to foster the interaction of different generations at various levels. Several projects have been sponsored: school activities (with schoolchildren visiting rest homes to share some time with the elderly); volunteer movements promoted by the elderly themselves (with groups where young people can come to know popular games, recipes, and arts, as well as to share some traditional experiences such as planting and harvesting rice); programs fostering the daily interaction of different generations, as expressed in the decision to build infrastructures like health centers and rest homes in the proximity of schools.

> The activities to promote intergenerational interaction not only hope to inculcate in the young a sense of empathy towards the old, but more importantly, they reveal the hopes that such contacts serve as lessons to teach the young filial piety and that they should provide care for their own parents in the future.[12]

Declining Birth Rates

Another demographic factor that contributed to modify the family structure in the past twenty years is the decline of birth rates to well below the level of generational replacement.[13] The declining fertility problem (*shōshika mondai* 少子化問題) reached the public awareness during the 90's, but the phenomenon itself began in the 70's, and its causes are to be found particularly in Japan's sudden prosperity, the improved healthcare system, and the widespread use of contraceptives.

There are two main reasons for the more recent and radical decline in birth rates (sometimes referred to as "second demographic transition"): first, better job opportunities for women (including salary increase and rapid growth in the level of education); second, women's perceived difficulty in adequately managing the growth and education of their children, as well as in learning how to effectively balance the energies dedicated to their job and those dedicated to their family.

Concerning the first factor, we should observe that job opportunities have a great impact on the life or formation of families: the number of working hours, for example, determines the amount of time one has to interact with one's family; differences in salary affect not only one's quality of life, but also one's decision to relocate or to find an occupation near home; career ambition may delay one's choice to get married and have children. Several studies on salary ranges show that in 1970 a woman aged 25–29 and employed full-time used to earn only 62% of a man's salary; by 1999 the percentage was close to 83%.[14] Furthermore, while in 1970 only 18% of female high-school graduates would attend university, in 2003

12. L. L. Thang, "Touching of the Hearts: An Overview of Programmes to Promote Interaction between the Generations in Japan." In R. Goodman, ed., *Family and Social Policy in Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 173.

13. M. Jolivet, *Japan: The Childless Society? The Crisis of Motherhood* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

14. See on this M. Rebick, "Changes in the Workplace and Their Impact on the Family." In M. Rebick and A. Takenaka, eds, *The Changing Japanese Family*, op. cit., 75–90.

this number rose to 47% (compared to 42% of males).[15] By contrast, the number of female managers in Japan is lower than that recorded in other countries; this is due in particular to the fact that women usually interrupt their professional career to raise their children. In fact, it is very difficult for women above 30 to resume their career (or to start a new one) and maintain their old salary.[16] This means that if a woman wishes to pursue a professional career, she has no other choice but to postpone marriage (and the decision to have children), thus contributing to the decline of birth rates.

As for the second point—the difficulties encountered by women to raise children—it must be observed that the network of parental support, which used to help a mother to reach her educational goals, is gradually disappearing. In fact, while mothers from past epochs may be harshly criticized for the way in which they exercised *shitsuke* (躾, or "inculcating good manners and teaching correct behavior"), at least they could rely on the support, guidance, and moral authority derived from their family. Today, instead, the influence of these forms of support is minimal, and a mother's educational goal (i.e., that her child become an "ordinary" or "common person—*jūninnami* 十人並み) is considered tedious and difficult to achieve.[17]

Moreover, many women wish for their husband's cooperation and involvement in the education of their children, but they find themselves alone in this task: not only is the husband absent during most of the day, but he also stands completely aloof from the dynamics of the formative process.[18] For this reason, women and men have nearly opposed feelings about parenthood: some women alternate between feelings of anxiety or apprehension (expressed with such terms as "painful," "boring," "tiring," "unpleasant") and those of hope and expectation ("pleasant" and "enticing"), while men think of parenthood as "difficult" and "exhausting," even though some men do express positive sensations with terms like "interesting" and "attractive."[19]

In spite of the different opinions concerning parenthood, about 80% of the women (single and with a stable job) who participated in the Japanese National Fertility Survey conducted by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research expressed

15. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Tokyo: National Printing Office, 2004). When to these data we add the number of people who attended technical schools, the percentage of Japanese who have had some form of higher education rises to 70% for both women and men.

16. Women who return to work after maternity leave usually have access only to part-time jobs with a lower salary and reduced benefits. Cf. F. M. Rosenbluth, "The Political Economy of Low Fertility." In F. M. Rosenbluth, *The Political Economy of Japan's Low Fertility* (Standford: Standford University Press, 2007), 3–36.

17. Cf. S. Holloway, *Women and Family in Contemporary Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 119–42. The author claims that, contrary to the stereotype according to which Japanese mothers encourage their children to be competitive and excel, the qualities that a mother seeks to foster in her children are basic kindness (*yasashisa* 優しさ), empathy (*omoyari* 思いやり), sensitivity (*sensai* 繊細), politeness (*reigi tadashii* 礼儀正しい) and to avoid bothering others (*meiwaku kakenai yōni* 迷惑かけないように).

18. Ibid., 92–115.

19. See on this N. Nagase, "Japanese Youth's Attitudes towards Marriage and Child Rearing." In M. Rebick and A. Takenaka, eds, *The Changing Japanese Family*, op. cit., 39–53. Cf. also D. A. Tahhan, *The Japanese Family: Touch, Intimacy and Feeling* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

the desire to marry, have children, and resume their professional life as soon as their children reach school age.

> Many perceived it difficult to continue work after childbirth due to a lack of what they considered necessary conditions: (1) their employers' understanding and cooperation, (2) their husband's unwillingness to share the burden of household duties and, for employees in Tokyo, (3) availability of good day-care centers right after maternal leave or child-care leave and in the non-metropolitan areas, (4) grand-parental help in child raising.[20]

And if to all this we add the high cost of child services, it will be difficult to find a balance between one's ambition to resume one's professional life, the desire to start a family, and the aspiration to have children. For this reason, the ideal number of children for generational replacement in Japan (2.62 in 1982 and 2.56 in 2002) is well above what Japanese women actually desire (or envision) to have (1.41).[21]

Declining Marriage Rates, and Delayed Marriages

In many industrialized countries, the average marrying age has substantially increased in the last few decades. In Japan this phenomenon occurred particularly between 1970 and 2008, with an age increase from 26.9 to 30.2 for men and from 24.2 to 28.5 for women. Of considerable importance is also the number of unmarried people: in 2005, 59% of women aged 25–29 and 32% of women aged 30–34.[22] In the same period there was also a sharp rise in divorce rates (from 2% to 5%) for individuals between 20 and 30. This drastically increased the number of singles, whether divorced or unmarried. As reported by the Institute of Population and Social Security, "the number of single households almost doubled between 1980 and 2005 from 16 to 30 per cent of households. The rate is as high as 43 per cent in urban areas like Tokyo."[23]

All these elements point to the fact that an ever increasing number of individuals marry

20. Ibid., 47.

21. Cf. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2005, at <www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/saikin/hw/jinkou/geppo/nengai04/kekka4.html>. It should be observed that, although the government and the media speak of declining birth rates as a negative phenomenon, some scholars and ecologists point out that it also has some benefits, especially in terms of greater environmental sustainability. For example, in an article for *The Japan Times* Paul Erlich wrote: "I think that what the government should be doing is to encourage small families and working longer (in life)," *The Japan Times*, 13 November 1999. Commenting on this article, Glenda Roberts writes that, according to Elrich, "the budget problems during the initial years when workers were insufficient in numbers to shore up the pensioners would be transitional: with increasing technological advances there are fewer physical barriers to older people working and welcoming migrant workers could remedy future problems of labor shortage." G. S. Roberts, "Pinning Hopes on Angels: Reflections from an Aging Japan's Urban Landscape," in R. Goodman, ed., *Family and Social Policy in Japan*, op. cit., 54.

22. These data are from the Cabinet Office, Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. Population Census, 2008, at <http://www.stat.go.jp/english/index.htm>.

23. Institute of Population and Social Security, "Population Statistics of Japan, 2008", at <http://www.ipss.go.jp/index-e.html>.

later in life (or choose cohabitation before marriage), but also, more fundamentally, that many of the decisional dynamics which in the past were essential to the process of forming a family have gradually lost their appeal. In the attempt to identify the causes of this phenomenon, some studies focusing on the changes taking place in capitalistic societies show that young people increasingly invest their energies and resources in the satisfaction of personal interests (or lifestyles) to the detriment of forming a family.[24] This problem seems more worrisome than those experienced in the past because

> what is breaking up is the nuclear family, the fundamental unity stripped of relatives and left with two essential functions which cannot be performed better elsewhere: childrearing and the provision to its members of affection and companionship.[25]

Up until recently Japan seems to have been immune to this crisis for two reasons: because the family system of the *ie* was a guarantee of social cohesiveness, and because divorce rates and birth rates outside of marriage had remained relatively low. By contrast, if we look at other data (such as the number of people who wish to remain single and of families who do not intend to have children), there are good reasons to suspect that the Japanese family structure today shows clear signs of weakening and crisis.

But there are other factors that encourage Japanese people to resist or postpone the formation of a family. First, not all Japanese women view marriage as something desirable, even if their partners happen to be financially stable. This fact can in part be explained by reference to the traditional gender division of labor, where the man is solely responsible for maintaining the family, and the woman is wholly in charge of housekeeping and the education of children.[26] A recent study conducted by the Cabinet Office reports that, in families

24. D. Popenoe, "American Family Decline, 1960–1990: A Review and Appraisal," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 1993, 55/3: 527–42, cited in R. Richard and A. Allison, *Home and Family in Japan: Continuity and Transformation*, op. cit., 14.

25. Ibid.

26. See M. Rebick, "Changes in the Workplace and Their Impact on the Family." In M. Rebick and A. Takenaka, eds, *The Changing Japanese Family*, op. cit., 75–90. A. Nakatani writes: "The rise of public interest in fatherly roles is scarcely a new phenomenon. Since the mid-1970s, social critics, journalists and psychologists alike have repeatedly voiced their worries that the prevalent family situation, typically labeled as 'the absence of fathers from home' (*chchioya fuazai*) or 'the lack of paternal authority' (*fusei no ketsujo*), will cause a negative impact on children… The lines of rhetoric put forward by these 'pro-fatherhood' critics have remained surprisingly unchanged over time. Often building on a nostalgic image of the '*ganko-oyaji*' (stern father) or '*kaminari oyaji*' (thunder father) who used to be the domineering figure in pre-war Japanese families, they argue that fathers have 'essentially' different roles from those of the mothers; the fathers can take their 'turn' when children grow old enough (say, after entering a primary school) to understand their moral lessons. Fathers are encouraged to play with their children more often and to teach them basic social manners such as proper greetings as well as the core rules of their family… By contrast, mothers are to be there to look after the babies and toddlers on a day-to-day basis… A mother naturally values childcare as the most satisfying element in her life (*ikigai*), thus it is almost malicious for the husband to interfere with her task" (A. Nakatani, "The Emergence of 'Nurturing Fathers.' Discourses and Practices of Fatherhood in Contemporary Japan." In M. Rebick and A. Takenaka, eds, *The Changing Japanese Family*, op. cit., 96).

with children, men normally dedicate 5 minutes per day to house chores (as compared to women, who spend 3–4 hours, even if they have a full-time job), and less than a half hour to the education of children (as opposed to the 4 hours spent by women).[27]

Moreover, men limit their house chores to "playing with the children" and "Sunday shopping," and there are very few fathers who cook or are directly involved in the academic education of their children.[28] In addition to this, traditionally women are also responsible for the care of the husband's aging parents. For a woman, the chronic absence of her husband due to his job, and the distance from her family due to her duty to care for the husband's parents, are often a cause of stress and loneliness. Thus, especially since the 80's,

> women expect from men not only three "heights" (*sankō* 三高, high income, high level of education and tall high), and the three "goods" (*sanryō* 三良, good looking, good natured and good background), but also the three C's' (which refer to the ideal that a man bring home a comfortable income, be communicative and be cooperative with household and childcare).[29]

Finally, one of the most common causes of the decline in marriage rates is Japan's recent economic instability; for in a situation of endemic financial crisis, to be able to rely on a decent and stable salary is a necessary condition to meet the cost of living of a new family. But, beginning in the 90's, the Japanese job market recorded a dramatic decline in the job demand for new university graduates, with a growing number of young people being able to find only temporary and low paying occupations. In 2001 unemployment rates reached 10.4% for young men and 8.7% for young women aged 15–25, and over 40% of people in this age group found only part-time jobs.

However, it is far from clear whether a reversal of this negative trend in employment would also determine an improvement in marriage rates. For too long now the job market has been prioritizing part-time hiring, and companies are revising their policies in favor of temporary employment and fixed-term contracts. This means that the number of young people who are forced to depend on their parents for board and lodging is unlikely to decrease in the near future.

Difficulties afflicting today's Japanese family

Divorce

Contrary to the trend in other industrialized countries, divorce rates in Japan decreased immediately after the war, only to rise suddenly after 1964 with the widespread conviction

27. Cabinet Office, "Shakai Shakatsu Kihon Chōsa—Sekatsu Jikan," 2001, at <http://www.stat.go.jp/data/shakai/2001/jikan/zenkoku/zenkoku.htm>.

28. Cf. A. Nakatani, "The Emergence of 'Nurturing Fathers.' Discourses and Practices of Fatherhood in Contemporary Japan." In M. Rebick and A. Takenaka, eds, *The Changing Japanese Family*, op. cit., 94–108.

29. G. Matthew, "Can a 'Real Man' Live for His Family? Ikigai and Masculinity in Today's Japan." In J.

that one out of three marriages would not last. Recent studies suggest that in the next few decades over 30% of marriages will end in divorce.[30]

Although recent public debate concentrated on divorces of middle-aged or retired couples, the majority of divorces concern people in their thirties whose marriage lasted less than ten years. According to government statistics on legally registered divorcees, in 2006 about 60% of people who filed for divorce belonged to families with children under 20, and in 80% of these cases, custody of children was given to the mother.[31]

From a legal standpoint, divorce in Japan occurs when the person filing for it submits the names, residence, signatures, and official seal of the couple to a government office. When the application is accepted, the separation is formally sanctioned without any need of a lawyer or for the couple to appear before a judge. Some 90% of divorces are registered as "mutual" or "uncontested" (*kyōgi rikon* 協議離婚), a formulation indicating that the two spouses agree about filing for divorce and approve of it.[32] This does not mean that there were no disputes between the spouses, but that the legal system was involved only after they had reached an agreement about the division of property, the custody of children, alimony, etc.

Furthermore, 9% of divorces are settled through court-ordered mediation (*chōtei rikon* 調停離婚). After the spouses have reached a compromise concerning the divorce, their case is mediated, not by judges or lawyers, but by designated members of the local community. These mediators, who do not have any legal ties with the contracting parties, meet with the spouses to help them to reach a final agreement (whether to go back to live as a couple or to accept the separation). However, the spouses consider this type of divorce unpleasant and impersonal (as well as demeaning) due to the cold procedure through which it is reached.

Finally, the remaining 1% of divorces in Japan include divorces by decision of the family court (*shimpan rikon* 審判離婚, when spouses are unable to reach a compromise), divorces by judgment of a district court (*saiban rikon* 裁判離婚, when the family court is unable to reach a consensual decision), and divorces by decision of a tribunal (when one of the spouses can no longer be reached).[33]

Robertson and N. Suzuki, eds, *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the Salaryman Doxa* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 116.

30. Data of the Institute of Population and Social Security, "Population Statistics of Japan, 2008," at <http://www.ipss.go.jp/index-e.html>.

31. The Institute of Population and Social Security maintains that in the same period (2006) the percentage of mothers who obtained custody of their children reached 81.5%, while children were entrusted to their fathers only in 14.9% of cases. These numbers certainly reflect the common and modern conviction that, contrary to the practice of the ancient *ie* system (where the child would remain in the father's house), mothers are more capable than fathers in educating their children.

32. Ibid.

33. "The 1947 Japan Civil Code, article 770, establishes five grounds for unilateral divorce if this cannot be reached by mutual agreement: a) infidelity; b) malicious desertion; c) uncertainty as to whether or not the spouse is dead or alive (after a period of at least three years); d) serious mental disease without hope of recovery; e) a 'grave reason' which makes continuing the marriage impossible." Cf. "Getting Divorced in Japan," at <http://www.nic-nagoya.or.jp/en/e/archives/5018>.

This list of legal procedures to obtain a divorce must be supplemented by a recent development which somehow challenges the naive assumption that a marriage can result only in one of two alternatives for the spouses—love or separation. This is the so-called phenomenon of "divorce within a house" (*kateinai rikon* 家庭内離婚), an expression designating the relation between two spouses who lead separate lives while still sharing a residence. Some think that this situation is reproachable and accuse the couple of "faking" a family life to avoid scandalizing their neighbors, to evade the social stigma associated with divorce, or simply because financially neither spouse could afford to live separately. However, others judge this situation favorably, interpreting it as the couple's attempt to face their problems and, at the same time, maintain some financial security and pursue personal lifestyles.

The cause of high divorce rates in Japan is still under scrutiny, with experts divided on the question of whether divorce is the consequence or the cause of rapid social changes. Nevertheless, in spite of conflicting opinions, the debate on divorce allows one to pause and reflect on the criteria used to determine whether a marriage is a success or a failure, on how the pursuit of personal happiness affects one's decision to end the relationship, and on how new ideas about marriage for the sake of love and character compatibility influence the couple's decision to separate. Thus, we may endorse a lucid observation by Bob Simpson, who analyzed the phenomenon of divorce in America and Great Britain, and apply it to the Japanese context:

> Divorce is the point at which marriage is officially dissolved but is also the point at which the principles, assumptions, values, attitudes, and expectations surrounding marriage, family, and parenting are made explicit.[34]

Child Abuse and Domestic Violence

While Western countries were in the process of reflecting on the causes and consequences of child abuse in their societies, Japanese scholars were busy explaining why Japan was immune to such a problem.[35] The reasons given to justify the absence of this phenomenon in Japan were sought in the features that were believed to make Japanese society harmonious and efficient, both socially and economically.

Among these features, the following stand out: the stability of the Japanese family (in which the elderly were cared for, divorce rates were low and there were no single mothers); the conviction that Japanese mothers were the most skilled and competent in the world; the fact that local communities enjoyed excellent relations with the police, schools, and social services; finally, the belief that the organization of Japanese society was nearly perfect (with low unemployment, poverty, and crime rates). Throughout the 90's, when the dramatic

34. B. Simpson, *Changing Families: An Ethnographic Approach to Divorce and Separation* (Oxford: Berg., 1998), 27. Cited in A. Alexy, "The Door my Wife Closed," in R. Richard and A. Alexy, eds, *Home and Family in Japan: Continuity and Transformation*, op. cit., 242.

35. Cf. Y. Ikeda, "A Short Introduction to Child Abuse in Japan," *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 1982/6: 487–90.

extent of the phenomenon of child abuse became apparent, the arguments formerly used to portray an idyllic and ideal country were now held responsible for the situation: the family and the economy were in ruin, the high number of child abuse cases was due to the absence of a paternal figure in the education of children, society did not provide sufficient support to mothers who, far from being skillful educators, now displayed alarming symptoms of what was called "childrearing neurosis" (*ikuji noirōze* 育児ノイローゼ).[36]

The primary promoters and initiators of the debate on child abuse were lawyers, pediatricians, and paramedics employed by family tribunals, child counseling centers (*jidōsōdanjo* 児童相談所) and local children's homes (*yōgoshisetsu* 養護施設). It is thanks to the repeated warnings issued by these professionals that in 1990 the Ministry of Health formulated an official definition of "child abuse," limiting it to four categories (physical abuse, neglect or the refusal to protect, sexual abuse, and psychological abuse), and listed "abuse" (*gyakutai* 虐待) among the conditions requiring a mandatory examination at a child counseling center.[37]

Furthermore, in the 90s' the issue of child abuse was examined in greater depth in relation to the debate on whether or not Japan should sign the international Convention on the Rights of the Child. Numerous reports by child counseling centers, the uproar generated by the media periodically reporting cases of abuse, and the discovery of abuses not only within the family, but also in academic and social institutions,[38] soon forced the government to direct its attention to this problem and promote initiatives to counteract its effects by allocating 900 million yen during the year 2000 (this sum grew to 4.7 billion in 2003 and to 16.6 billion in 2004).[39]

36. See on this M. Ohinata, "The Mystique of Motherhood: A Key to Understanding Social Change and Family Problems in Japan." In K. Fujimura Fanselow and A. Kameda, eds, *Japanese Women: New Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present and Future* (New York: City University of New York, The Feminist Press, 1995), 199–203.

37. R. Goodmann observes: "A 1973 survey, the first to be carried out by the government, used the five categories of: abandonment; murder; *oyako shinjū* (親子心中 parent-child suicide); murder by abandonment; and abuse, which was defined as causing physical injuries by violence, not providing food over a long period and endangering life. The distinction in the survey between 'abandonment' and 'murder by abandonment' referred largely to where the child was found abandoned. In the former case, children were generally left in the open public areas such as parks, hospitals and post offices with the intention that they should be found and taken into care; in the latter case, they were found locked in their own homes or coin lockers and had been left to die" (R. Goodman, "Child Abuse in Japan." In R. Goodman, ed., *Family and Social Policy in Japan*, op. cit., 137). See also T. Fujimoto, *Crime Problems in Japan* (Tokyo: Chūō University Press, 1994). Cf. also R. Goodman, *Children of the Japanese State. The Changing Role of Child Protection Institutions in Contemporary Japan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

38. R. Goodmann reports several titles of articles published in major Japanese daily newspapers during 5–18 May and 20 June–21 July, 2001. Here is the latter list of titles: "21 June, *Mainichi*: 'Staggering 18,000 child abuse cases reported last year;' 22 June, *Asahi*: 'Reported child abuse cases up 50%;' *Japan Times*: 'Child-killer sent up for 15 years;' 23 June, *Yomiuri*: '2 arrested over death at nursery;' *Mainichi*: 'Woman dumps newborn's body;' 4 July, *Mainichi*: 'Osaka step-dad beats bed-wetting daughter to death;' 9 July, *Kyōdō*: 'Man gets suspended term for hanging boy upside down;' 10 July, *Mainichi*: 'Man fatally bashes baby for not drinking milk'" (ibid. 132).

39. *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 18 February, 2004.

And in the same years, while Japan was "discovering" the problem of child abuse, the spotlight was turned on the issue of domestic violence. According to some experts (Fujieda, for example), during the 80's the discussion on domestic violence was limited to the phenomenon of violence against children by their parents (*kateinai bōryoku* 家庭内暴力), while violence against women by their husbands or partners was not subject to debate.[40]

Contrary to the widely accepted theory that Japanese males were "by nature" less violent than their American or European counterparts, Fujieda argues that the phenomenon of domestic violence was barely recognized due to the peculiarity of the Japanese context (which prevents women who were the victims of violence from revealing their situation), and to the fact that the phenomenon itself was yet to be precisely defined, thus remaining difficult to identify.[41]

In 1998 the government began to collect data on domestic violence, even though it was still difficult to interpret the true magnitude of the problem (for example, a 2001 government survey relates that less than 1% of women who were subjected to domestic violence admitted that they had reported it to the police).[42] The event that provided ultimate visibility to the phenomenon was the arrest of a Japanese Consul in Vancouver for domestic violence. The Consul justified his behavior by claiming that to beat one's wife was a culturally accepted practice in his country of origin.[43] It was not too long before the implications of such a claim became apparent, and in order to foster the public debate and prevent the issue from being swallowed up once again in indifference and meaninglessness, Japanese media began to report cases of domestic violence more frequently.

The phenomenon may be explained by appealing to several causes. Some associate it with the stress generated by Japanese society (also claiming that people in high-ranking positions have a greater propensity to perpetrate violence), while others think that it is due to the reduced number of people in today's Japanese family: in small family units men become obsessively attached to their mothers and excessively demanding with their wives.[44]

40. See M. Fujeda, "Some Thoughts on Domestic Violence in Japan," *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, 1989, 12: 60–6.

41. Suffice it to say that in the 90's, when domestic violence was the second reason most frequently mentioned by women filing for divorce, in Japan there was only one shelter for battered women (in Kanagawa Prefecture).

42. R. Goodman rightly observes that, just as there are specific cultural forms of child abuse (e.g., to lock a child outside the house rather than in his or her room), so too there are peculiar cultural forms of domestic violence, such as turning over a table (symbol of the female role), throwing water and salt in the face of a woman (thus rendering her impure), and refusing to use condoms when other contraceptive means are unavailable. These cultural differences complicate the debate on domestic violence as it is perceived in Japan (compared to the way it is perceived in other countries) even further. Cf. R. Goodman, "Policing the Japanese Family. Child Abuse, Domestic Violence and the Changing Role of the State." In M. Rebick and A. Takenaka, eds, *The Changing Japanese Family*, op. cit., 158.

43. The case is discussed at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/wife-beating-diplomat-ordered-home-1.18807>.

44. On this second explanation, see H. M. Gaspar Pereira, *Patterns of Family Violence in Japan* (Wellesley: Wellesley Centers for Women, Working Paper n. 411, 2003).

In any event, we can say that as the awareness of the problem grew, so did the number of cases reported to the authorities, with a sixfold increase in incidents reported to the police between 1998 and 2002. The collected data show that, generally, the perpetrators are alcoholics (75%), males (90%), and that in many cases (42%) they gave vent to their violence in the presence of children—a factor suggesting that domestic violence and child abuse are intrinsically related.[45]

Parasaito Shinguru

There is no agreement among experts concerning the reasons that lead young people to postpone marriage and having children. Broadly speaking, we find two factions in the debate. Some, like economist Yashiro Naohiro,[46] blame the changes on economic conditions and the lack of structures for children not yet of school age—an essential element for young people who wish to change the rigid division of gender roles in the workplace. Others, like sociologist Yamada Masashiro (author of the popular *The Age of Parasite Singles*)[47] blame Japanese youth for choosing the security and comfort provided by their parents over married life (hence the expression *parasite single*). In 1999 the number of *parasite singles* was 10 million; today it has grown to 13.8 million (i.e., 35% of the Japanese population aged between 20 and 30).[48]

In general, *parasite singles* are not living in tight financial circumstances, since they depend on their parents for both lodging and basic necessities (laundry, food, etc.). While having a source of income, most of them (80%) do not contribute to the household and think of their income as completely at their disposal. This form of economic parasitism allows many young people to spend their money on fanciful goods and services or in expensive restaurants and stores; and if, on the one hand, this contributes to the flourishing of certain businesses, on the other it detracts resources from other areas of trade, such as the real estate industry.[49]

The second group of scholars produced three distinct theories to explain the phenomenon of parasitism.[50] The first, defended by the aforementioned Yamada, holds that the truly guilty party in all this are not the children but the parents, for it is the latter who decided to provide their children with the affluent and carefree lifestyle which they could not experience in their youth. If the parents did not spontaneously give their children lodging, along with support in managing the household, parasitism would hardly be an issue. The effects

45. Cf. *Japan Times* 21 January, 2004.

46. N. Yashiro, *Japan Rapidly Aging Population* (Tokyo, Foreign Press Centre, 1982).

47. M. Yamada, パラサイトシングルの時代 (Tokyo: Chikumo Shobo 1999).

48. *Mainichi Daily News*, "Time to take courageous steps to combat declining birthrate," 19 February, 2006.

49. Cf. M. Simkin, "Plague of 'Parasites' could be sucking life from economy," in *Asahi News Service*, 12 April, 2001.

50. For a discussion of these theories, see M. Tran, "Unable or Unwilling to Leave the Nest? An Analysis and Evaluation of Japanese Parasite Single Theories," at <http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/discussionpapers/2006/Tran.html>.

of this problem on the job market and on decisions concerning married life are obvious. Since *parasite singles* are under no pressure as regards income and lodging, they are free to work whenever they wish (and choose the type of job they prefer).

As for the choice to postpone (or simply avoid) marriage, it is mostly rooted in the singles' desire to maintain the high living standards they have reached by living with their parents. Yamada suggests two solutions to this problem: first, to provide young people who wish to live independently with support and incentives (for example, by giving them tax breaks, by making homes more easily available to young couples, by providing better educational assistance for their children, etc.); second, to advise parents against allowing their grown children to live under their roof (for instance, by introducing a substantial tax increase for families with unmarried adult children).

The second theory that attempts to explain the phenomenon of *parasite singles* is by Genda Yūji, who focuses his attention on the economic roots of the problem. Genda is convinced that young people continue to live with their parents not by choice but by necessity.[51] The current job market does not encourage the hiring of young people (instead, it aims at keeping older workers by increasing their salaries), thus forcing them to rely on their parents for financial aid and lodging. To remedy this situation, Genda suggests that companies reconsider their remuneration system and reorganize their personnel to "fundamentally alter their relationships with individual workers."[52]

The third and last theory is of a feminist bent and holds that young Japanese women decide to keep living with their parents as a sign of protest against a society dominated by male chauvinist ideology. By remaining *single*, they can lead a life free of all the duties connected to marriage (housekeeping, caring for the husband, children, and parents), thus avoiding at the same time the sacrifice of their "freedom of movement and of lifestyle" (*kōdō ya ikikata ga jiiū* 行動や生き方が自由) for a low paying job.

In any case, Japan should deal with the problem of *parasite singles* for two reasons. First, because sooner or later young *parasite singles* will have to take care of their aging parents (who, in turn, will see their children as a source of security in their old age), and their possibilities of starting an independent family will thus be limited.

The second reason, formulated by Hoffmann,[53] concerns the extension of the same phenomenon to couples. These couples, referred to as *parasite couples* (*parasaito kappuru* パラサイトカップル), often relocate near one of their families of origin in order to receive regular financial assistance, as well as to get help from their parents in the education of their children, thus making it possible for themselves to enjoy breaks and short vacations away from home.

51. See Y. Genda, "Don't Blame the Unmarried Breed," *Japan Echo*, 2000, 27/3: 54–6; Y. Genda, "Youth Employment and Parasite Singles," *Japan Labor Bulletin*, 2000, 39/3: 55–6.

52. Ibid., 56.

53. M. Hoffman, "Parents Beware! Here Come Parasite Couples," *The Japan Times*, 8 December, 2002.

Hikikomori

The term *hikikomori* (引きこもり "withdrawal," "isolation") generally designates the condition of a person who has withdrawn from social life in a self-imposed state of confinement at home for over six months. The expression was coined by the psychiatrist, Tamaki Saitō, who found similarities in the symptoms of an ever increasing number of adolescents—symptoms such as lethargy, incommunicability, and complete isolation.[54] Thus, this phenomenon cannot be reduced to a simple pathology or mental illness (*seishinbyō* 精神病), but must be described as an existential and social condition that involves mainly people in the 18–50 age bracket (although individuals most affected by it tend to be in their twenties). Government surveys conducted in 2010 recorded 700,000 cases of *hikikomori* in Japan (including individuals who, while mostly confined to their room, occasionally leave the house to practice a hobby), and 1.55 million potential *hikikomori* (i.e., people who expressed the desire to live in isolation).

One of the habitual attitudes associated with this condition is the complete loss of interest in school (*futōkō* 不登校) and work related activities; cases of violence and aggression against one's parents have also been recorded. A common feature of 81% of *hikikomori* is the inversion of the daily cycle: the subject is awake all night and falls asleep in the morning so as to avoid all social interaction (including interaction with family members). This does not mean that all *hikikomori* never leave the house, particularly at night. A 2003 survey shows that only 9.7% of reported cases never leave their room; 17% are afraid to be outside (although they occasionally roam around the house; 20.8% leave the house only under certain circumstances; and 40% leave the house frequently—in 83% of cases, to use a 24-hour convenience store).[55]

Some studies point out that men, especially firstborn sons (perhaps due to the excessive expectations placed on them by their families), are affected by *hikikomori* more than women. *Hikikomori* seems to affect middle-class families in a particular way because a family must be well-off to support an adult child; unsurprisingly, the phenomenon is found less often in low-income families, since the children who did not graduate from high school are compelled to find a job outside the house and their isolation, if it ever began, ends rather quickly.

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare claims that the *hikikomori* phenomenon originated recently, and that its causes must be sought in the combination of several factors.[56] Educators, for example, think that it is due to a lack of interest in academic learning, while psychologists hold that it originated in traumas or disorders related to communication (particularly in a society like Japan, where personal opinions are hardly ever expressed

54. T. Saitō, *Hikikomori: Adolescence without End* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

55. *Kōserōdōshō*, Tokyo, Kokuritsu Seishin/Shinkei Centre, 2003, at <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/topics/2003/07/tp728-1.html>.

56. Ibid. Cf. also M. Zielenziger, *Shutting Out the Sun: How Japan Created Its Own Lost Generation* (New York: Doubleday, 2006).

openly, and emotions are seldom manifested). Others still believe that *hikikomori* developed out of a changed economic scenario and the difficulty of young people to find a job, and sociologists think that it should be explained with reference to the Baby Boom generation (i.e., the generation of the parents of individuals currently affected by *hikikomori*), in the sense that the baby boomers are seen as the primary culprits of increased aging rates in Japanese society.

In addition to this, some think that the *hikikomori* phenomenon simply results from the crisis of the Japanese family structure and this for several reasons. Some insist that it originated in an insufficient exchange of *amae* (甘え, or the need of dependence of someone seeking care from a parent—but also from a spouse, a teacher, or a superior) between mother and child. This is an emotional deprivation that hinders the achievement of emotional stability and balance in adulthood.[57]

By contrast, Saitō claims that the ideal model of Japanese independence is to be sought in what at first sight may appear to be its opposite, namely filial piety (*oya kōkō* 親孝行), and traces the symptoms of *hikikomori* back to one's failure to depend on one's family. Others are convinced that *hikikomori* derives not only from excessive protection by, and dependence on, one's mother, but also from the complete absence of a father figure in the process of education: lacking this figure, the child grows without a model of male gender identity. Finally, some argue that *hikikomori* originated in the attempt to resist the excessive rivalry that characterizes the school and work systems, where children and young people are forced to compete and excel.

To date, two approaches have been suggested to remedy the *hikikomori* problem: the approach based on resocialization, and an approach that promotes a radical change in the parents' behavior. In the former case, it is a matter of establishing communities for people affected by *hikikomori* so as to give them the possibility to interact away from their original environment. In the latter case, it is a matter of persuading parents to accept the situation of their children: even if this acceptance does not directly help the *hikikomori* to emerge from their isolation, it nevertheless represents an essential requirement to try to reestablish some form of communication between the two parties. At the same time, parents, and especially mothers, are encouraged to let the *hikikomori* organize their lives as they think best, so as to avoid making them feel that they are the focus of the family's attention and overpressuring them to emerge from their isolation.

An initiative that has met some consensus is the formation of local support groups—sometimes called "parents groups" (*oya no kai* 親の会) or "family groups" (*kazoku no kai* 家族の会)—open to family members of *hikikomori*, and occasionally to *hikikomori* themselves. By sharing their experiences, *hikikomori* allow other group participants to achieve a

57. M. Nakagaito, "The Society that Generates Social Withdrawal," *Japanese Journal of Addiction and Family*, 2004, 21/1: 17–26. On the concept of *amae*, see T. Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence* (New York: Kodansha International, 1973).

better understanding of the causes of their situation and to find ways to help *hikikomori* to overcome their domestic and social withdrawal.[58]

Homelessness and Changed Occupational Scenarios

During the 90's, and especially after the 2001 election of Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō, Japan promoted some radical neoliberal policies in the attempt to emerge from the so called "Lost Decade" (*ushinawareta jūnen* 失われた十年).[59] One of the most significant elements of the new economic politics was the intense deregulation of occupational policies for large companies, and the suppression of the benefits promoted by the social policies of the post-war period (especially in connection with the acquisition of real estates).

Thus, companies soon got rid of the old system of *quid pro quo* that had characterized working relations between employer and employee, a system based on two crucial factors: the guarantee of a lifetime contract and the gradual development of one's career and salary on the basis of seniority. Due to this changed situation, during the years 1982–2006, the rate of irregular workers jumped from 15.8% to 30.6%, with a significant increase in the percentage of youth aged 20–24 (from 11.4% to 42.2%).[60]

The people who were most affected by this restructuring of occupational practices (and by the recession) were those who already found themselves at the margins of society, that is, individuals and families who did not enjoy the protection afforded by a secure and regular job.[61] Although the Constitution states that "all people shall have the right to maintain the minimum standards of wholesome and cultured living" and that "in all spheres of life, the State shall use its endeavors for the promotion and extension of social welfare and security, and of public health" (art. 25), in actual fact, an ever increasing number of citizens, especially those living in urban centers, were systematically ignored by both the work and the welfare system.

Several factors contributed to this situation. First, historically, the welfare system, whose primary purpose was to prevent poverty, has gradually turned its focus on a wider objective: to promote the wellbeing of all citizens. This means that access to welfare services came to be guaranteed only to people whose names were recorded in a family register and who had a permanent address and a job. All those who did not meet these conditions were excluded from welfare programs and did not qualify for government

58. A detailed treatment of these groups and their dynamics can be found in S. Horiguchi, "Coping with *Hikikomori*. Socially Withdrawn Youth and the Japanese Family." In R. Richard and A. Alexy, eds, *Home and Family in Japan: Continuity and Transformation*, op. cit., 216–35.

59. The expression is used to describe a situation of arrest and stagnation during the years 1991–2001, when the Japanese economy grew very slowly due to the burst of the economic bubble, that is, the overestimation of stocks without any ground in the real economy.

60. Cabinet Office, Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. Population Census, 2008, at <http://www.stat.go.jp/english/index.htm>.

61. A 2001 survey conducted in Tokyo shows that 98% of them were men, 93% in their forties, and only 6% married. Cf. M. Iwata, "Social Exclusion and Homelessness." In Y. Hirayama and R. Ronald eds, *Housing and Social Transition in Japan* (London: Routledge, 2007), 140–64.

subsidies. This led to an increased number of homeless people and the formation of an unusual class of day laborers who gathered in special districts called *yoseba* (寄せ場) to be hired by employment agencies.[62]

The drastic decline of the construction industry following the 1991 burst of the "economic bubble" (or "speculative bubble", *baburu keiki* バブル景気) further diversified the hiring method of day laborers in two important respects. The first is the change of the residential conditions of the workers, who had now moved from the *yoseba* districts to the *hanba* (飯場), residences where a landlord both manages the housing situation and dispatches workers to the various construction sites.[63]

The second change concerns the modality of employment of the workers: if in the *yoseba* they would wait for someone to employ them for the day, now they were hired through a "regular request" (*kaozuke* 顔付け, a method not unlike the one used in the *yoseba*, even though now the worker was the "regular" laborer of certain recruiters) or by cell phone (a method which contributed to reduce the sense of community among workers even further and ruthlessly screen out those who were older, weak or undisciplined).[64] These data clearly show that the neoliberal policies adopted through the 90's actually contributed to a radical polarization of society, reducing a growing number of individuals to poverty, and depriving many of the choice to start a family by turning them into day laborers.

Lastly, two groups of recently marginalized workers are the so called *freeters* (フリーター) and the *neet* (ニート). The first term (a hybrid neologism from the English "*free*" and the German word for worker, "*arbeiter*") designates young irregular and underpaid workers (aged 15–34) employed in convenience stores or restaurants. The second term (an English acronym of "*Not in Employment, Education or Training*") indicates those people who are in the process of receiving instruction or formation, are not employed (nor are they seeking employment), and are not engaged in activities such as internships or housekeeping.

62. *Yoseba* districts consist of shacks and outdoor job markets where people compete to be hired as day laborers by construction and transportation companies. Recently these run-down shacks have become the residence of homeless and middle-aged destitute people. Cf. T. Gill, *Men of Uncertainty: The Social Organization of Day Laborers in Contemporary Japan* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001).

63. Some researchers think that workers in the *hanba* are ranked and divided on the basis of their competence level. At the lowest level are people whose work is not particularly in demand, hence the decrease of their daily wages and their gradual decline into homelessness. For a discussion of the ongoing social changes, specifically in Tokyo, see A. Nishizawa, "The Changing Face of Homelessness in Tokyo in the Modern Era." In R. Richard and A. Alexy, eds, *Home and Family in Japan: Continuity and Transformation*, op. cit., 200–215. Some of the data reported in the main text are taken from Nishizawa's article.

64. According to Nishikawa there are two other types of temporary accommodations for irregular workers: the "*rest box*" (*resto bokkusu* レストボックス) and the "*net café*" (*netto café* ネットカフェ). The former are normally found near some major train stations, in buildings with dorm rooms for people who cannot afford to rent an apartment. Although as a type of residence *rest boxes* are very similar to a *yoseba* or a *hanba*, those who make use of them say that they are much more independent in their work choice (so they consider this accommodation as a marked improvement to a *hanba* or a *yoseba*). Contrary to those who crowd *rest boxes*, workers who spend time at a *net café* are looking for a job through the internet; however, since they do not have a permanent residence, they will be hired only for a daily job or a temporary employment. Ibid., 210–14.

According to some recent data, in 2001 there were 4.17 million *freeters* and 640,000 *neet* (with a 50% increase from the previous decade).[65]

Although many young people manage to escape the negative effects of this new economic situation thanks to the help of their families, the prospects of finding a secure and well-paying job—two conditions that are considered essential to start a family—seem to be slowly disappearing from Japan's socio-economic scenario, thus leaving Japanese youth insecure about their present and discouraged and pessimistic about their future.

LEGISLATIVE SOLUTIONS IN FAVOR OF THE FAMILY

So far we have analyzed some of the situations that are contributing to transform the concept of family. In what follows we would like to report and comment on some of the laws promulgated by the government to try to find a solution to the problems examined earlier.

In an attempt to cope with an aging society and declining birth rates, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare drafted (and later revised) certain measures called Angel Plans (*enzeru puran* エンゼル プラン). With the first Angel Plan (1994–1999), the government intended to provide women with better child daycare services, create new infrastructures to assist working couples, and foster a family model based on equality (in which both spouses are equally responsible for the management of the family and the education of children). The purpose of this plan was to encourage couples to have a second child, and convince women that this would not compromise their professional careers.

However, in the late 90's the government had to recognize that this first set of directives failed to invert the negative trend in birth rates. Thus, a second Angel Plan (2000–2004) was launched. The plan's goal was to increase the number of child care assistance programs (such as temporary shelters for newborns and children), to double the number of assistance centers for families with two working parents (from professional relocation services to family advisory services for the treatment of infertility), and to institute assistance programs for young people with problems of behavior and social integration. The third Angel Plan (2005–2009) increased maternity benefits for women opting for a second child—an initiative supported also by the fourth and latest Angel Plan (2010–2014).[66]

Regrettably, though the drafting and emendation of these legislative measures was quick, their implementation was not. At the same time, employers still behave discriminatorily towards women who apply for maternity leave (for example, by assigning them

65. Cabinet Office, Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. Population Census, 2008, at <http://www.stat.go.jp/english/index.htm>.

66. M. Sutton, "Japan's cloudy prospects for higher fertility," *Japan Times*, 31 December, 2010. On the law proposal to increase maternity benefits (*jidōteatehō* 児童手当法, or *kodomoteatehō* 子ども手当法 Child Allowance Act), see the article "Kodomo Teate Law" at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kodomo_Teate_Law>. For a reasoned discussion of the various Angel Plans, cf. G. S. Glenda, "Pinning Hopes on Angels: Reflections from an Aging Japan's Urban Landscape." In R. Goodman, ed., *Family and Social Policy in Japan*, op. cit., 54–91.

burdensome tasks or shifts so as to force them to quit their job when they get married, or as soon as they have a child).

It is precisely against these forms of discrimination in the workplace that the government issued the first Equal Employment Opportunity Law (*danjokoyōkikaikintōhō* 男女雇用機会均等法). Drafted in 1985 and entered into force the following year, this law "stipulates that employers must not discriminate against women in job training, fringe benefits, mandatory retirement age, resignation, and dismissal. Also the law requires that employers do their best to avoid discrimination against women in recruiting and hiring, job assignments and promotion."[67] However, the legislators did not envisage any sanctions for employers who violate this law, since compliance with it was (and still is) voluntary, not mandatory. The law was revised in 1997 through the introduction of new regulations, such as the prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace, abolishment of overtime and increased sanctions against companies whose internal guidelines were at variance with the new legislation, etc.

The laws on child abuse and domestic violence require a separate treatment. A first Child Abuse Prevention Law (*jidōkyakutaibōshihō* 児童虐待防止法), promulgated in May 2000 and entered into force in November of the same year, significantly reinforced the powers of the supervisors of the 157 child advisory centers located in the various prefectures: it gave them the authority, not only to take children mistreated or abused by their parents into custody, but also to forbid the parents from seeing their children once these had been admitted to one of the centers.

Moreover, it became mandatory for medical and welfare workers and teachers to report all allegations of child abuse to the competent authorities; it was established that the police should cooperate with the people in charge of inspecting homes where cases of child abuse might have occurred; finally, for the first time a law imposed a zero tolerance policy for all abuses, even ones perpetrated under the pretext of disciplining one's children. In spite of all this, the public opinion strongly criticized this law for failing to be even stricter: for example, the prerequisite for police intervention (i.e., exhibition of irrefutable proof of abuse before they enter premises) was considered too cautious, for it would hinder, rather than facilitate, police operations.

Almost in the same year, the government promulgated the Law on Prevention of Spouse Violence and Protection of Victims (*haigūsha kara no bōryoku bōshi, higaisha hogohō* 配偶者からの暴力の防止, 被害者保護法). This law (also known as "DV Law" or "Domestic Violence Law") allowed the issuing of protection ordinances for a period of over six months in favor of the abused spouse, and the removal of the accused party from the house for over two weeks (although the latter regulation could be enforced only once, in order to avoid infringing upon the property rights of the accused party). Anyone who violated these dispositions could be fined up to one million yen or be incarcerated for up

67. C. Usui, "Aging Society and the Transformation of Work in the Post-Fordist Economy." In F. Coulmas, ed., *The Demographic Challenge: A Handbook about Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 173.

to one year. Although reported cases of domestic violence were constantly on the rise, the reception of this law by public opinion was not very positive since the law was once again considered too "weak." In fact, even while the DV Law stated that the police would do their utmost to prevent victims from undergoing further domestic violence by their spouses, this was a recommendation rather than an obligation.

Just as in the law on child abuse, in this case, too, we must observe how the government decided (or was asked) to make its voice heard ever more frequently in contexts once considered "private" or exclusively "domestic." As Goodman acutely observed, the reasons for these "intrusive" pleas by the government must be sought in the public opinion's changed perception of the family.

> Parents, for example, were no longer seen as "naturally" and unquestionably good and it was no longer unthinkable that they might, in certain circumstances, resort to abusing their children. The authority of fathers and husbands was no longer considered sacrosanct. The stability of the family… was no longer accepted as necessarily superior to the rights of the individual members, particularly women and children. Even those who worked with children—in nurseries, child welfare institutions or as foster carers, for example—who had previously been held to be largely above suspicion, were no longer immune from prosecution.[68]

In short, the transformation produced by these laws on the relation between State and family was profound and rather unexpected. The family, once viewed as a welcoming and friendly place (even if at times stern and rigorous in its education), is now considered potentially detrimental and dangerous for children. Those parents and people employed in education and child care centers who are found guilty of abuse (mostly physical and psychological, rather than sexual) should now expect much harsher prison sentences than they would have received a few decades ago.

Moreover, in the 2004 debate on the revision the DV Law, public opinion called for an extension of the restrictive ordinance for violent perpetrators from two weeks to two months (so as to give women who were victims of abuse more time to find an alternative residence), as well as the inclusion of the names of ex-wives and children of perpetrators in the list of people in custody (or under protection).[69]

However, due to the regularity with which the State is called to intervene in matters concerning the family, many question the legitimacy of such an intrusion, wondering in particular about the boundaries that the State should respect if it is not going to obliterate the already all too thin line between private and public life.

68. R. Goodman, "Policing the Japanese Family. Child Abuse, Domestic Violence and the Changing Role of the State." In M. Rebick and A. Takenaka, eds, *The Changing Japanese Family*, op. cit., 155.

69. *Daily Yomiuri*, 11 February, 2004.

THE FAMILY OF THE FUTURE

As we mentioned earlier, during the government led by Koizumi Jun'ichirō (2001–2006) Japan underwent some radical socio-economic changes, particularly in the field of liberalization and privatization of the job market. More precisely, the Koizumi government suggested that the broader restructuring (or "structural reform," *kōzō kaikaku* 構造改革) of the national economic system should include policies for the reform of the family.

A government report on the quality of life issued in 2002 by minister Takenaka Heizō, who was then in charge of economic reform, explicitly stated that the conventional family model (in which the husband is the head of the family and the sole source of income, while the wife is a housekeeper) is outdated and the source of more risks than certainties. The reason for this is that the traditional model established in advance, and all too rigidly, the life path of its members, and by doing so, it tended to limit the freedom of choice of individuals in a time of economic uncertainty and diversification of lifestyles.

Furthermore, Takenaka held that the structural reform should also include the deregulation of the workforce for two simple reasons: first, in a free-market system, not only the husband but both spouses are encouraged to find a job to support their family; second, each member of the couple should be free to satisfy his or her desires and be able to lead a fulfilling and gratifying life.

Takenaka's initiatives were followed by a report by the members of the Future Life Discussion Council (*Mirai seikatsu kondankai* 未来生活懇談会) entitled "The Great Voyage, the Guidelines for the Future Life" (*Seikatsu daikōkai, mirai seikatsu eno shishin* 生活大航海, 未来生活への指針) and published in December 2002.[70] In this interesting document the authors imagine what life in Japan will be like in the year 2030, building their vision around three main concepts: aesthetic sense (*biishiki* 美意識, or the individual's attitude toward daily life); choice (*sentaku* 選択, emphasizing that individuals are free to choose their own life path in conformity with their peculiar aesthetic sense); security (*anshin* 安心, whereby individuals are given a second chance to realize their goals if they had previously failed to do so). Following these simple guidelines, the report goes on to illustrate various future scenarios by taking into account the economy, society, the family, working styles, lifestyles and, finally, ways of learning.

In the subsection on the family, the authors analyze seven types of future families (*kazoku* 家族).[71] The first type is composed of two married persons (without children) who

70. The text of the report (in Japanese) is the result of 14 meetings among the members of the group; it was presented directly to Minister Takenaka, and can be downloaded at <http://www5.cao.go.jp/seikatsu/mirai_seikatsu/index.html>. The group was composed of 7 people: 4 academics (Seike Atsushi—Professor at Keio University and President of the group; Sasaki Takeshi—President of Tokyo University; Miyazaki Midori—Associate Professor at Ciba Commerce University; and Yamada Masahiro—Associate Professor at Tokyo Gakuei University); 2 business leaders (Okutani Reiko—entrepreneur; and Sodegawa Yoshiyuki—member of a marketing company); lastly, the independent novelist C. W. Nicole. Cf. <http://www.caa.go.jp/seikatsu/mirai_seikatsu/profile/iin-no-shokai.html#okutani>.

71. Here I follow the enlightening article by H. Takeda, "Reforming Families in Japan. Family Policy in

constantly supported each other through their professional careers, thus realizing their respective ambitions and at the same time improving the couple's quality of life.[72]

The second type resembles the traditional nuclear family (a couple with two teenage children), but its main feature is that each of its member lives in a different place yet manages to maintain a satisfactory level of communication with the rest of the family.[73]

The third and fourth types of family are composed of married couples with a double income and children depending on them. The report goes on to describe what the couples belonging to the third and fourth types of family have in common, namely the fact that they are financially responsible for their families and make use of services by the government, private institutions, and non-profit organizations for the education of their children.[74]

The three remaining types of family are all involved to some degree in the care of the elderly. In the first case, the elderly relative is cared for at home, but with the benefit of public and private home care services the burden on the other family members is lighter and they can afford to take brief trips away from home.[75] The second case examines the example of a collective residence for the elderly where five people live together, sharing their living space (dining room, living room, kitchen, laundry room, and the garden).[76] As for the last type of family, they live in a rural village with limited health care assistance; but despite the fact that the elderly father suffers from dementia, the development of information technologies makes it possible for the patient to have access to high quality medical service, thus allowing him to be with his family rather than in a distant and anonymous hospital.[77]

These seven family types illustrate how life in the future will be quite pleasant and comfortable, and individuals will be encouraged to pursue their ambitions freely and act autonomously to improve the quality of their existence. People's efforts will be rewarded by the government if, and only if, they commit to forming family units in conformity with the features of the family types we just examined.

Oddly, however, when closely examined, all these family types display the same features of the traditional family that they were meant to replace: the people mentioned in the report are individuals of school age, in formation, or who have found a job; they spontaneously use private and public services aimed at improving their lives, and have (or plan to have) children. The only real difference between these families and families from the past

the Era of Structural Reform." In R. Richard and A. Alexy, eds, *Home and Family in Japan: Continuity and Transformation*, op. cit., 46–64.

72. *Jiritsushite otagai no seichō wo sasaeau fūfu* (自立してお互いの成長を支えあう夫婦).

73. *Hanareteitemo shinmitsuna oyako kankei* (離れていても親密な親子関係). According to the report, "today, in most cases, children live away from their parents after their graduation from high school. But those parents and children tend to build intimate and frank relationships by communicating via mobile phones and the internet."

74. *Kosodateni taisuru kigyō no ishiki no shinka* (子育てに対する企業の意識の進化) and *Niizu ni atta shitsu no takai hoiku sābisu* (ニーズにあった質の高い保育サービス).

75. *Anshinshite makaserareru kaigo sābisu* (安心して任せられる介護サービス).

76. *Hitorigurashi kōreisha no nakama sagashi* (一人暮らし高齢者の仲間探し).

77. *IT riyō de kaiteki, anshin, kōreisha seikatsu* (IT利用で快適, 安心, 高齢者生活).

is that the former are double income families. Moreover, 2030 Japan does not seem to have room for families with a single parent or with divorced parents, unmarried couples living together, and families with non-Japanese spouses—contrary to what is happening ever more frequently in *today's* Japan.

In addition, the report makes no mention of the quality of the relations among family members: all are too busy with their job, or with their studies, to dialogue with each other; elderly parents seek independence from their family, while young couples increasingly delegate the education of their children to assistance services, and contacts between family members take place primarily via cell phone or the internet.

For these reasons, Koizumi's successors introduced the issue of morality into the debate on the family. More specifically, the first Shinzō Abe government (2006–2007) tried to counteract declining birth rates by launching campaigns that invited young people to consider the importance of starting a family, by reflecting on the pride of having children and suggesting that the affective and moral interdependence among the members of the family is essential to the survival of the family unit. As Abe himself wrote,

> I think we should preserve the idea of the family in which we have father, mother and children and grandparents are also part of the family. Also we should maintain a sense of value that regards living together in such family as the best way to achieve happiness.[78]

In Abe's vision, the family represents the foundation of the State, the "beautiful Japan" to which one nostalgically wishes to return by introducing only a few radically liberal changes to current economic policies. This is a vision which, behind the rhetorical clichés on personal initiative and the desire to foster personal lifestyles, presents the family, not as directed toward the future, but rather as dangerously swallowed up by a past in which it was at the mercy of the nation's whims.

Reflections of the Japanese Catholic Church on the Family

Before we conclude our study on the changes that are taking place in the Japanese family system, we would like to comment briefly on the response given by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan to the questionnaire of the Secretariat of the Extraordinary Synod,[79] a questionnaire "prepared by the Synod on the Family which intended to define the '*status quaestionis*' and to collect the bishops' experiences and proposals in proclaiming and living the Gospel of the Family in a credible manner."[80]

78. S. Abe, *Utsukushii kuni e* (Tokyo, Bungei Shunjū, 2006), 219.

79. Catholic Bishop's Conference of Japan, "Response to the Secretariat of the Extraordinary Synod," at <http://cbcj.catholic.jp/jpn/doc/pontifical/synodus/synodus_ex3th/res_eng_sp3.pdf>.

80. Cf. <http://www.familiam.org/pls/pcpf/v3_s2ew_consultazione.traduzione?id_pagina=5682&id_lingua=2>. It is important to bear in mind that this preparatory stage, which ended in 2014, will be followed by an Ordinary General Assembly in 2015 to draw up working guidelines for the pastoral care of the person and the family.

The general premise that "efforts at evangelization in the country have borne little fruit" is followed by a brief description of the current situation of the Church (440,000 Catholics, corresponding to 0.35% of the population; 76% of marriages of Catholics involve a non-Catholic partner) and of the family ("weakening of family bonds, few children, aging society, increasing divorces and abortions") in Japan.

The text goes on to describe two events that show how the Japanese Church made considerable pastoral efforts in response to the situation of the family. The first event was the 1993 *National Incentive Convention for Evangelization* (NICE II, including representatives from the laity), which "took the situation of families as its starting point and examined how best to promote the Church's mission of evangelization."[81] The second event was the 2001 publication of the document *Reverence for Life—A Message for the Twenty-First Century from the Catholic Bishops of Japan* in response to the urgent problems concerning the family and life.[82]

In reviewing the responses to the questionnaire, we can begin by observing the bishops' replies to the initial questions concerning the general knowledge of the position of the Bible and the Magisterium on the value of the family. The bishops acknowledge that the believers' knowledge of these texts and documents is rather deficient and often limited to teachings about prohibitions (on abortion, birth control, divorce, new marriage, etc.). Further, since Japanese Catholics are influenced by non-Christian customs and traditions, they consider the teachings of the Church as irrelevant to their lives (this is particularly true in regard to teachings on birth control methods and divorce, which are thought to violate traditional wisdom). And since, "Japanese culture emphasizes societal expectations rather than abstract principles as guides to action," the idea of marriage as founded on natural law is considered not only abstract and vague, but also incomprehensible.

With respect to the pastoral care of the family in the context of evangelization, the bishops emphasize that "marriage is nowadays frequently a response to pregnancy with a desire to legitimize the child. Often, the couple have been cohabiting for a long time, as is becoming more and more common in Japan, even among young Catholics. In the case of those who come from Catholic families, their desire to marry in the Church is often more due to family pressure than to a commitment to the faith." And they add: "There is little sense of the family as a 'domestic Church,' the aging of the Catholic population is making young Catholics less willing to be part of parish communities, marriage preparation is generally haphazard… conveying the faith to the next generation is at an extremely critical point and is a major challenge."

Concerning the care of difficult marriage situations, the bishops stress the fact that "the pastoral practice of the Church must begin from the premise that cohabitation and civil

81. The results of the convention were passed on to the bishops' conference. In response, the bishops issued a statement, *The Family and Evangelization*.

82. The document consists of three chapters: "The Message of Scripture," "The Troubled Family" and "Life and Death."

marriage outside the Church have become the norm and, in the common situation of a Catholic partnering with a non-Catholic, the non-Catholic refuses to marry according to the law of the Church." The divorce rates among Catholics are very similar to those among non-Catholics, and many Catholics are unaware that they may not continue to receive communion if they remarried after their divorce.

In addition to this, there are issues related to Catholic immigrant workers living in Japan. Some of these workers were married to non-Christians and never had their marriage recognized in some way by the Church; others started a new family in Japan even though they already had one in their native country. For these and other reasons—argue the bishops —"a simplified procedure for annulments is not only needed, it is essential. Especially in mission countries like Japan, where Christians are few and where the civil code admits divorce it can be very difficult to gain the cooperation of a non-Christian party in Church proceedings."

In particular, many asked for a simplified procedure for the declaration of annulment of the bond of marriage in order to pastorally improve the relation of the Church with divorced and remarried people. One of the reasons often mentioned in support of this type of change is that "90% of marriages that take place in the Church in Japan are between a baptized and a non-baptized person, and this involves Canon Law and tribunals." Moreover, "in such situations where promises are not fulfilled, and where even divorce might take place, the sort of tribunal appearances by the non-Catholic party that Rome requires for a declaration of nullity are almost always impossible." Naturally, "the cooperation of the non-Catholic party should be sought as much as possible. But in cases of mental illness or domestic abuse, for example, the authority to issue a declaration of nullity should remain with the local tribunal. Simplification of the legal proceedings will be the salvation of those who are suffering."

Other issues concern "the education of children in irregular marriages and the openness of the married couple to life," given that "contemporary Catholics are either indifferent to or unaware of the teaching of the Church, and that social and cultural values as well as financial considerations are considered more important" than those of responsible parenthood and natural birth control.

But the concern and apprehension of the bishops is especially palpable when it comes to the description of "situations in the family today which can obstruct a person's encounter with Christ." "Parents who are too busy with daily life and find it impossible to make time to encounter God in tranquility, silence and prayer; situations where both parents work and many children return to an empty house; the many cases of domestic violence, child abuse, social withdrawal and suicide which are not discussed openly in society nor in the Church; the few opportunities to share domestic concerns; the elderly who endure lives of loneliness…" These are only some of the problems that today seem to undermine the family structure.

For this reason, it is important that the Church presents not only the stern face of commandments and precepts, but also a healing face, one that supports and encourages those

who are unable to realize her ideal. This task is all the more urgent in a context where "the increasing number of people who do not marry, the increase in single parent families, the situation of the elderly and the aging of society, the problems facing the children of the elderly are all problems that face family life today that were unimagined in the past" and challenge the Church to reflect seriously on the meaning of the expression "Christian family."

In spite of all this, the bishops are convinced that a Church like the Japanese Church must take advantage of every opportunity to proclaim the Gospel, especially in celebrations like weddings and funerals, where the majority of the participants are not Christian and come into contact with the Church and get a "taste" of Christian life for the very first time.

> The Church often falls short in this, presenting a high threshold for entry and lacking hospitality and practical kindness, when instead it must be a refuge for those worn by the journey of life, and ceremonial occasions are places where they can experience that refuge.[83]

CONCLUSION

The Japanese family system is constantly evolving; but in some respects it also remains unchanged. Despite the constant decline in birth rates, and the fact that couples marry later in life, only 2.2% of births occur outside marriage. And, regardless of the current tendency to postpone marriage, 88% of women and 87% of men claim that they intend (or desire) to marry in the near future.

Furthermore, in spite of changes in gender roles (with an ever increasing number of young women joining the workforce), many are convinced of the importance of the mother figure in the care of children—a conviction referred to as *sansaiji shinwa* (三歳児神話), or the popular belief that it is preferable for children to be cared for by the mother until they are three years old. Although many women (28%) choose to postpone marriage in favor of their career, the majority (56%) look forward to accepting the responsibility for childrearing, even if this means that they would have to quit their job. The media constantly praise those men who decide to spend time and energy for their family, even if the obstacles they have to face in doing so are at times insurmountable.

83. The analysis of Japanese Buddhism would require a separate chapter—for example, on the True Pure Land School founded by Shinran (1173–1262, a religious leader who thought of himself as "neither monk nor layman," *sō ni arazu, zoku ni arazu* 僧にあらず俗にあらず), in which monks are allowed to get married and start a family. Limited space prevents us from dealing with this topic, but the reader may consult the interesting article by L. Meeks, "The Priesthood as a Family Trade. Reconsidering Monastic Marriage in Premodern Japan." In L. Wilson, *Family in Buddhism* (Albany: Suny Press, 2013), 253–75, as well as the book by J. Richard, *Neither Monk nor Layman: Clerical Marriage in Modern Japanese Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

All these data confirm that the family in Japan remains the most basic unit of society and at the center of several policies concerning welfare, education, and employment. Undoubtedly, there is an increasing concern for the decline of family values caused by divorce, domestic violence, and problems related to monoparental families, but the family (*kazoku*) understood as a "social institution" certainly does not seem to be "outdated."

Our study emphasized that, while it is true that there is no longer a single "type" of family, the family as such has displayed a formidable capacity for adaptation in the face of the numerous demographic, economic, and social transformations undergone by the country. Therefore, we could say that the family is not so much in a condition of "crisis," as in a constant process of transition, reformulation, and transformation.

The Church observes this process with a certain measure of apprehension, but also with the necessary attention and concern with which she is urged to witness to God's infinite love for humanity, and to communicate God's plan for all His children in a spirit of hope and love.

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Philippines

Everaldo dos Santos

Our young people think about nothing more than love affairs and pleasure. They spend more time attempting to seduce and dishonor young women than in thinking about their country's welfare. Our women, in order to take care of the house and family of God, forget their own. Our men limit their activities to vice and their heroics to shameful acts. Children wake up in a fog of routine, adolescents live out their best years without ideals, and their elders are sterile, and only serve to corrupt our young people by their example.

José Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere* (1886)

To put the world in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must cultivate our personal life; and to cultivate our personal life, we must first set our hearts right.

Confucius

Within the past half-century the Philippines has moved from being a predominantly rural and agricultural to an industrial and urbanized society. Seen as an economic development it has brought new social changes to the nucleus of the society, the family,

which is tossed about but keeps on transforming and re-inventing itself. The globalization phenomenon has created international employment opportunities for migrant workers, especially women, prompting them to subject themselves—or even aspire—to work abroad to better support their families back home. And this has been one of the major agents of change in the Filipino traditional family settings because the function of the family changes when husbands and wives are separated for long periods of time; the structure of the home changes when a wife goes to work overseas and leaves her family behind. The children risk to grow up affectively closer to aunts and grandparents than to their parents, a situation which often produces stress and anxiety. Husbands and fathers who traditionally knew exactly what their role in the family was as breadwinners now feel threatened and confused in their very identity as more and more, women are induced to include breadwinning in their motherhood functions.

Medina, a sociologist and anthropologist from the University of the Philippines fittingly points to the fact that

> The family cannot be understood in isolation from the rest of society. It is integrated into the community and culture to which it belongs. Family patterns vary according to such factors as rural-urban residence, ethnic and cultural orientation, or historical background and experience.[1]

Accordingly, this study will attempt to identify some of the major historical changes especially related to politics and economy. Then it will proceed to underscore main changes within family structures and worldviews. After that it will proceed to pinpoint how the state pictures the family based on how it appears in the law, and how the Church envisions and reacts to the most recent challenges families have been facing. Finally, an attempt will be made to look into the future of the Filipino family.

In turning our attention to the changes in the family in the Philippines, apart from the premise that a family does not exist in a vacuum but in a social and historical context, so that whenever changes occur in the larger milieu, the family is necessarily provoked to undergo changes as well; there are at least other two important factors to keep in mind. One is that Filipinos are a multicultural people with Chinese, Spanish, Malaysian, South Asian, American, Christian and Islamic influences which contribute to a great variety of concepts. The other is that there are many constellations of Filipino families, all ranging from traditional extended families with multiple-generation households to transnational family arrangements; from cross-cultural and interracial marriages to gay and lesbian couple unions, all driven by historic economic, political and cultural factors.

EXTERNAL CHANGES

Before proceeding in presenting the internal changes taking place within the Filipino

1. B. T. G. Medina, *The Filipino Family* (Manila: The University of the Philippines Press, 2001), 271.

families, it might be helpful to briefly look at some external factors and historical unfolding that have occurred in Philippine society. Economically, during several centuries of colonization by Spain and the United States, the Philippines produced crops and mined minerals for export and sale to the world market. Since gaining independence in 1946, the Philippines has experienced ups and downs in cycles of economic growth, decline, and recovery. In the 1960s, neighboring countries perceived Philippines as a showcase for development. At that time, the Philippines had a newly burgeoning middle class and one of the highest literacy rates in the region. However, the economy began to slip down when Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law (1972–1981) to perpetuate his power. Subsequently, the economy entered a period of some positive growth and recovery as Gross National Product (GNP) rates began to increase steadily. The GNP, however, is only a measure of improvements being made at the level of infrastructure. However, changes in the GNP are not always a clear indication that the quality of life for the majority of families has improved.[2]

Politically, the Philippines has long been striving to institute a free and democratic way of life. It was one of the first nations in the Region to gain independence from colonial rule. It succeeded in overthrowing an authoritarian dictator (Ferdinand Marcos) in 1986, and it did this through an active, nonviolent people power revolution. Again, the Philippines peacefully ousted an inept and corrupt president (Joseph Estrada) from office in 2001, and his successor (Gloria Macapagal Arroyo) who served as the president of the Republic for two consecutive terms is at present under hospital arrest due to corruption, too. Although traditional leading families and new military elites still hold and control powerful governmental posts, a fresh resurgence of people's movements continues from below, supported by churches and nongovernment organizations, calling for a more equitable, just, and democratic society. In the face of these changing circumstances, the Filipino family has proved to be quite resilient in maintaining its fundamental worldview.

Prevailing Cultural Worldview

Filipinos trace their family relations bilaterally through the mothers' and fathers' lines. One can observe that relations between husbands and wives and between men and women generally, tend to be more egalitarian in the Philippines than in many other cultures and societies. This may be because the Philippines was a matrilineal society before being colonized by Spain (1565–1898) and the United States (1898–1946). The pre-colonial family line was traced through the distaff, while males inherited their political titles and followings from their mother's brother. The close relationships between brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, and men and women in general, are typically filled with dignity, protectiveness, and respect. Although the male-centered colonization processes effected some significant changes in the traditional gender system, Filipino women in comparison

2. See full article on this at the online encyclopedia at <http://family.jrank.org/pages/1277/ Philippines.html>.

to their Euro-American counterparts have enjoyed a relatively high status that can be traced to these early beginnings.

According to case studies[3] the traditional Filipino family acknowledges the importance of both consanguineal (blood) and affinal (marriage) ties. Ritual kinship in terms of godparents is recognized as being special because it is embedded in the Filipino community, although the Spanish introduced the practice. Consanguineal or biological ties, however, remain by far the most important relations. The blood bond is so close that even distant relatives are recognized. Mendez and Jocano found that some rural Filipinos, when choosing friends and possible spouses, carefully examined genealogies to assess virtues and shortcomings because they believed that a person's hereditary character shows what the person really is. Belen Medina,[4] found that blood bonds are so important, traditionally, that a person can be judged on the basis of who her or his relatives are. It follows that parents and children share an exceptionally strong and intimate bond. They give each other much mutual affection and respect. Children are taught by their parents to be gentle and deferential to elders, and this is carried on after they get married.

Gelia Castillo and Juanito Pua classify the Filipino family as "residentially nuclear but functionally extended."[5] This means that the household tends to be nuclear in form, but the family is extended in so far as relationships among members of the wider kin group are concerned. Members of the same kin group assist one another in times of need, and they participate in joint family activities even if they do not live together in the same household.

If the family living together in the same residential unit includes members other than a husband, wife, and their children, it is an extended family household. Many Filipino families living in the Philippines and abroad, such as in Canada or United States, actually live in extended family households. The family household may include grandparents, an unmarried aunt, an uncle, a cousin, a niece, or a nephew. Medina observes that by the end of the twentieth century, the Filipino nuclear family household was more commonly found in the rural areas than in the cities. This is because it is quite expensive for a typical Filipino family or single person, starting a new life in the city, to rent, build, or purchase a home right away. It is much easier for a family to construct a dwelling made of light materials such as bamboo and other natural plants that are freely available in a barrio setting. These simple homes are considered by many educated Filipinos today to be elegant and environmentally attuned. This appreciation for traditional dwellings was not the case during the American colonial and postcolonial period when concrete homes with corrugated steel roofs were introduced to replace them. Also, in rural communities,

3. P. P. Mendez and F. L. Jocano, *The Filipino Family in Its Rural and Urban Orientation: Two Case Studies* (Centro Escolar University Research and Development Center, Manila, 1974), cited at <http://family.jrank.org/ pages/1277/Philippines.html>.

4. B. T. G. Medina, *The Filipino Family*, op. cit., 22.

5. G. Castillo and J. Pua, *Research Notes on the Contemporary Filipino Findings in a Tagalog Area* (Manila: University of the Philippines Digest, 1963), 29–30.

kin members can build their household dwellings close to each other, which may not be possible in the city. Moreover, Filipinos who move away to study or work in cities, locally and abroad, tend to stay with their more affluent relatives, and this increases the size of the family household.

Virginia Miralao,[6] following Johan Gultang,[7] examines the transformation of Philippine society in relation to modernization theories that were first introduced by the sociologists Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. These evolutionary models posited that as societies modernize, social relationships become more impersonal and businesslike. At the same time, Durkheim and Weber characterized modern societies as being less religious oriented and more scientifically grounded. Philippine society, however, does not work in accordance with Western-derived notions of modernization, although such models continue to dominate development circles. Although society is indeed becoming characterized by more impersonal relationships, popular religious and social movements for an alternative such as holistic development paradigms are widespread and growing stronger. Moreover, modern Filipinos continue to be close-knit and family centered. Relationships among extended kin continue to be marked by reciprocal obligations and privileges even across great geographic distances.

Familism and personalism are all-pervasive in the Philippine society. Filipinos typically try to re-invent their friendships into family-like relationships that are mutually supportive. They prefer to have smooth interpersonal relationships with one another and go out of their way to create an atmosphere in which the people around them feel comfortable and accepted. Filipinos generally try to avoid confrontations and make use of indirect speech and mediators in situations of potential conflict. As elsewhere in Asia, there is a strong concept of face in the Philippines. This means that Filipinos are taught to be sensitive to other people's feelings and, generally, do not say words that may embarrass or shame a fellow human. Filipino parents consider it their duty to provide for the material and educational needs of their children. Children, in turn, are expected to obey and respect their parents and to take care of their parents when they grow old. Also, older children, until they marry and have families of their own, are expected to help younger siblings with school, and to assist them in getting a job after graduation.

Beginning in the 1970s, the Philippine government implemented an overseas employment program to absorb the increasing numbers of Filipino workers. This has led to new conceptualizations of the Filipino family and changing gender roles, as many married women have decided to migrate abroad to work, and their husbands stay home to care for the children. Today, most Filipino families are maintaining and reproducing transna-

6. V. Miralao, "The Family, Traditional Values and the Socio Cultural Transformation of Philippine Society," *Philippine Sociological Review,* 1997, 45: 189–215.

7. J. Galtung, "Anomie/Atomie: On the Impact of Secularization/Modernization on Moral Cohesion and Social Tissue," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy,* 1995, 15: 8–10.

tional household connections and networks. The Filipino family continues to be adaptive and functional in these new and changing circumstances.

Blend of Tradition with Modernity

As noted above, the Filipino society is changing. One can see technological progress in terms of skyscrapers, superhighways, and computers. We see the improvement of health and advanced medical knowledge through which complex surgical procedures can be performed locally, and increased life expectancy rate. One can see a change in values and behavior in terms of the increased participation of women in the labor force both locally and abroad. One can see the growth of mass media, trading, manufacturing and exports. One can see the continuous migration from rural to urban areas as well as the incessant movement of people going to and coming from work abroad.

Medina affirms that Filipino society is actually transitioning from a traditional-oriented kinship dominated type to one that is modern-industrial, oriented to rational norms and values. She explains that:

> In the traditional system, one's personality is subordinate to the interest of the kin group and interaction is characterized by emphasis on how persons are related to each other. Also, commitment and involvement are unlimited, similar to those between parents and children or between spouses, and priority is given to the expressive and integrative needs of the group. The modern-industrial system, on the other hand, is characterized by diversity in values, interests and goals; where a person is evaluated and judged on the basis of individual performance and achievement; where one's commitment and involvement are specific and limited; and where priority is given to the instrumental needs of the individual.[8]

Thus we can agree with our author that being in transition, Filipino society contains features of both the traditional and the modern types of sociocultural systems. Inserted in such a society, the family is in transition too. Therefore, based on whatever available data, this paper will try to delve into the past in order to understand emerging contemporary patterns.

INTERNAL CHANGES

Choice of Spouse

Medina goes on to demonstrate that in the past parents and relatives used to control the choices of the candidates for marriage and decide when, whom and under what circumstances their children would marry. Today, families generally grant their children the free-

8. B. T. G. Medina, *The Filipino Family*, op. cit., 276.

dom to choose and decide whom, when and how to marry. This is a very individualistic trend in the selection of life-time partners mainly triggered by the circumstances where young people leave their family to work far away, usually out of their relatives' sight. There is also an increase in youth mobility for recreation and leisure making it impossible for parents to monitor their children's activities and acquaintances. Those who live in rural areas have their interaction with the opposite sex under control, but once they leave for big cities for studies or work, they experience quite a good degree of freedom to interact with the opposite sex without any supervision.

While in the past there were more exclusive schools for boys and girls, now, co-education is promoted, a situation in which boys and girls are kept together over long periods of time. This favors romantic feelings which in the end become an accepted justification for an individual's choice of partner.

It has been noticed that among the present generation there is an increase in intermarriage between regional, national, racial and religious groups, marking the end of the traditional endogamous preference in the choice of espouses. In fact, the great mobility of people within the country and abroad plus the easiness with which one can communicate, especially through the Internet have widened the range of selection of the different ethnic, religious, national and racial groups.

Finally, motivated by economic interests or constrains, the past decades have seen a growing commercialized system of mate selection.

> The mushrooming of the mail-order bride system in particular hurt the sensibilities of civic and especially feminist groups who consider this a degradation and exploitation of Filipinas. This long-distance matchmaking through classified ads in the newspapers, love columns in magazines, lonely heart clubs, and catalogues and videotapes involves thousands of Filipino brides every year who leave for such countries as Australia, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, England, and the United States to start a family. This commercialized form of mate selection has a socio-economic rather than romantic love basis since most brides expect financial or economic security out of their marriage.[9]

In line with this, an even more recent trend is blooming which promotes second marriages among widows or separated people. The pattern is usually formed by a Filipino woman who seeks nothing but financial stability and an elderly foreign man who seeks nothing but companionship toward the end of his life. One gives good quality care in exchange for money and the other gives money in exchange for care.

Values Related to Sex

Sex used to be a topic considered shameful and only whispered upon, but now there is much openness in discussing and analyzing it. Most schools offer sex education in their

9. Ibid., 278.

curriculum and couples become more open to talk about family planning and postpone or avoid having children. Sex norms are changing and patterns of initiative in dating are no longer clear. While in the past, youngsters had to wait to be introduced to each other and the initiative to invite out, to drop by for a visit or send a gift on special occasion belonged exclusively to boys, now one can see girls taking initiative in starting a chat, dropping by for an overnight stay, inviting the boy out and sending gifts on special occasions. The practice of formally being introduced and inviting a girl out has been gradually replaced by "hanging out" or "getting together" pattern where boys and girls gather informally without having to be introduced to each other. In fact, many parents nowadays accept the idea that their children should meet and interact with as many members of the opposite sex as possible before being finally tied down to one.

Young people today easily and naturally engage in intimate behavior that lead to sexual intercourse. One of the consequences of this new morality which glamorizes sex is the increase in illegitimate unions and pre-marital pregnancies, a situation which produces no small amount of anxiety in parents.

As often pointed out by guidance counselors, there is a lack of ideal role models in media. Most of the TV idols and celebrities have children out of wedlock and keep on moving from one partner to another, providing food for gossip which daily periodicals and tabloids can feast upon. All of these, plus the availability of contraceptive devices and the proliferation of hotels and motels where illicit relations can take place conveniently.

Such permissive morality associated with the "porno industry" which easily caters through the Internet certainly contributes to the increase rate of sex crimes consisting of sexual harassment, sex trafficking, and rape.

Fragility of Marriage

While on the one hand, Census results and surveys show that an absolute majority of Filipino couples including those who have intermarried, are adjusted, happy and satisfied with their marriage, on the other hand, the number of court cases filed by spouses against each other, the applications for annulment of marriage, and the number of couples who are actually separated, show that today's marriages are becoming fragile, full of stress and tension. Our author, Belen Medina, captures the change that triggered much of the problems today:

> Marriage used to be an economic arrangement by kin where the husband was to earn or provide a living for his family while his wife was to take care of the domestic tasks. It was important for the husband to be industrious and for the wife to be good in housekeeping, cooking, spinning, and weaving. Today, the modern concept of marriage emphasizes mutual affection and companionship, an arrangement to fulfill personal goals such as having a home and children. The emphasis on sentimental personal relationships and self-realization places a heavier burden on today's family. Couples look to the family for intimacy, com-

> panionship, and expression of emotional needs. The marriage starts to crumble once they fail to find emotional satisfaction.[10]

Yet another reason for the increasing fragility of marriage today is the weakened social pressure to keep husband and wife together. Mate selection used to be supervised and controlled by parents and older kinsmen. The marriage itself was monitored so that the couple would have a stable and lasting relationship. When there was marital discord, relatives would admonish the couple to stay together for the sake of their children and to avoid the stigma of disgrace attached to a couple's separation. Today, however, young people are quite independent in the sense that they are allowed greater freedom from normative control.

> They choose their own partners in life, and value personal growth, happiness, and fulfillment above all else. Thus, they don't feel compelled to go on with a marriage which does not seem to be working.[11]

Changes have occurred also on the legal grounds for separation where the law has increased its tolerance to marital separation. The old Family Code of the Philippines accepted only two grounds for separation, namely, adultery or concubinage, and attempt on the life of one spouse by the other. Whereas the present one which was promulgated by the late President Corazon C. Aquino in 1988 includes ten grounds: 1) repeated physical violence or grossly abusive conduct; 2) moral pressure to compel the spouse to change religious or political affiliation; 3) attempt to corrupt or induce spouse or children to engage in prostitution; 4) imprisonment for more than six years; 5) drug addiction or habitual alcoholism; 6) lesbianism or homosexuality; 7) contracting of a subsequent bigamous marriage; 8) sexual infidelity or perversion; 9) attempt against the spouse's life; and 10) abandonment of spouse without justifiable cause for more than one year.[12]

Single Parenthood and Non-Traditional Types of Family

One of the changes that can be observed in family structural arrangement is related to the growing number of solo-parent families. This is not only due to widowhood but to several other factors such as:

Separation: Couples separate by means of divorce and in this case it is obtained abroad since it is not allowed by Philippine laws; however, local laws make provisions for legal separation and annulment which spouses can appeal to. Often, separation occurs due to desertion or abandonment by one of the spouses or simple arrangements between them where they decide to separate informally without going through legal processes;

Migration: When one of the spouses moves from the provinces to the city or to other

10. Ibid., 282.

11. Ibid., 283.

12. *Family Code of the Philippines,* 1988, Title II, Art. 55. Retrieved from <http://thecorpusjuris.com/laws/statutes/item/eo-no-209.html>.

countries, the one who is left behind usually takes up the role of both father and mother. The most common reason for this kind of migration is economic in nature so much so that the Philippines has long been known as a good provider of seamen to all shipping companies around the globe, a major supplier of nurses to the United States, entertainers to Japan, domestic helpers to Hong Kong, Singapore and several other European countries;

Illegitimacy: A single-parent family is also often composed of an unwed mother and her illegitimate child or children, or a mistress and her illegitimate child or children by a married man;

Adoption: While child adoption always existed in the Philippines, a new trend seems to have emerged in 1980s: the adoption of children by single men and women who have achieved security in their social and economic status. Usually they are rich people who seek further fulfillment through parenthood.[13] There are also those who value children for all the benefits they bring such as companionship, happiness, and security in old age.

Next to the single-parent is the prevalence of step or blended types of family referring to those composed of siblings who have been orphaned or whose parents are working abroad. There are the cases of childless couples and homosexual partnerships. However, the latter's incidence cannot be objectively known since this kind of living arrangement is frowned upon and is not recognized by law.

Another noted trend is the breaking up of extended households and the increasing nuclearization of the families to the point that by the beginning of this millennium less than 9% of households had other relatives included. Majority of households are composed of immediate members of the family only. Also the percentage of one-person households has steadily increased, a reflection of the increasing individual independence and the growing tendency to break away from the family to live separately. This group is mainly composed of males in large urban areas.[14]

Parenting Patterns

Due to a growing awareness of the rights of children, the more educated parents tend to use less authoritarian disciplining techniques, meaning to say that the traditional pattern of authoritarian parenting is giving way to a more liberal and less restrictive one. As most mothers are working mothers, part-time parenthood has also become common. The other part-time is under the care of either a close relative or a *yaya* (nursemaid) whenever the family can afford one. Whoever participates in the parenting function will certainly contribute to the values and attitudes transmitted which will eventually be internalized by a growing child.

In general, the father's role in child-rearing still remains minimal, even though there are indications that men are increasingly getting involved. Some fathers are already

13. A. Mercado, "The '80s Filipino Family. A Survivor Still," *The Manila Chronicle*, January 10, 1990.
14. B. T. G. Medina, *The Filipino Family*, op. cit., 285.

concerned with the Lamaze[15] method of child delivery and baby care; specially the most educated ones wake up at night to prepare milk and change their baby's diapers.

Traditionally children would be taken care of by relatives in case parents were absent, but now, parenthood in the form of nurseries and daycare centers are abounding and growing in availability. Most of the exclusive subdivisions or villages for instance have daycare centers while private schools admit pre-school age children to enable their parents to work. In fact, there is a law which requires all *barangays* (local government units) to have day-care centers.

It has been noticed that with the decline of parental authority, peer groups serve as role models and source of values and attitudes for the young in their process of socialization. Nevertheless, young people are not entirely free from the control and influence of their parents who remain to this day as dominant figures in the lives of their children and mothers, in particular, remain to be the main influence and confidante.

Regarding children, there is a serious problem related to child abuse which is physical, emotional and sexual. It is sad to say that the most abhorred type of child abuse, which is incest, is usually perpetrated by fathers, but the victim is afraid to report the crime either due to threats by the abuser or guilt feelings. Another form of exploitation is child labor. Even though it is forbidden by law, many children are in hazardous jobs like quarrying, mining, deep-sea fishing, construction and domestic work. Many urban poor children live on the streets trying to earn a living as vendors, newsboys, watch-your-car boys and traffic "facilitators." These situations have been attributed not only to poverty but also to the state of family relationships in which parents separate and re-marry in view of starting a new life, but neglecting the children of the previous marriage.

Authority of Elders

The pattern of authority in the family is one of the aspects that is undergoing significant modifications too. Traditionally, authority in the family goes vertically downwards on the basis of age. But today, even if deference is given to the elderly as the formally acknowledged head of the family, a younger and better educated family member can easily be the

15. Established in 1960, Lamaze International is a non-profit organization composed of parents, childbirth educators, healthcare practitioners and other health professionals whose mission is to advance safe and healthy pregnancy, birth and early parenting through evidence-based education and advocacy. It promotes: a) positive parenting is vital to the physical, emotional and spiritual health of our children, ourselves and our society; b) a safe, healthy birth experience provides a strong foundation for parenting; c) parenting is joyful, important, challenging and deeply satisfying work that is worthy of everyone's best efforts; d) parenting begins before birth. The intimate connection between children and their parents must be respected and protected from the moment of birth and throughout life; e) parents play unique, irreplaceable roles in their children's lives; f) babies and children thrive in close, consistent interaction with their parents; g) parenting is a learned art; our most important teachers are our own parents, our family and our children; h) good parenting requires the support of family, friends and community; i) knowledge and support enhance parents' confidence and ability to make informed decisions that meet the needs of their children and themselves. See article at <http://www.lamaze.org/ApproachToParenthood>.

real breadwinner, the decision maker and the household manager. Often, young people have much more educational, economic, and political opportunities for individual progress than their elders. Exposed to and influenced by all kinds of people in the large urban centers, plus all the connections taking place virtually and digitally through mass media with the rest of the world lead the young to be critical about the traditional attitudes and behavior of their elders. As young people claim more freedom and autonomy of decision for themselves, the authority and control of the elders decline.

However, the obligation to take care of the aged is still generally well-established as a Filipino value. In fact it is still considered a disgrace on the part of children to have other people take care of their aged parents. Thus, the family remains to be the social unit responsible for the welfare of its aged members. Majority of the elderly live with at least one child or has a child living nearby, while other children maintain regular contact and mutual financial and other forms of support.

Family Functions

Medina notes that certain functions which traditionally were performed by the family are now being shifted to other institutions. The barrio family used to be so self-sufficient that it produced all the goods it needed. The family raised the food, built and repaired the house, and took care of weaving the clothes. Today, the family can just buy factory-made clothes, canned goods from the supermarket and cooked food from fast-food centers or restaurants. The family used to take care of the sustenance, welfare and protection of its members to the exclusion of outside agencies. Today, government and private agencies such as insurance companies, social security systems, police, health centers, orphanages charitable organizations for the handicapped and the needy, and other specialized agencies are helping the family in these functions.

Similarly, the growth of nurseries, kindergartens, and specialized educational institutions today has lightened the load of the family in socialization and training of the young. The Church and many religious organizations are also taking care of the spiritual needs of family members. Lastly, commercialized recreational agencies such as movie houses, amusement centers, theaters and stadiums offer facilities for leisure and recreation to family members away from home.

Yet the family has retained some of the most critical functions such as procreation, primary socialization, and provision for emotional and psychological security and affection. It is the only socially approved and recognized agency to perform the function of procreation. It is the only agency which can really satisfy the psychological need for love and affection, intimacy, companionship, emotional security and nurturance to its members. It is the only agency which is expected to be the primary factor in personality development, instilling basic values, and offering guidance in major decisions in life.

OVERSEAS WORKERS: ECONOMIC BENEFITS AND SOCIAL COST

Approximately 10 million Filipinos live and work abroad either temporarily or permanently. An average of 3,000 people leave the country daily bound to any of the more than 100 countries where Filipinos are already present. For the past years the total yearly remittance of Filipinos working abroad has exceeded the amount of 22 billion dollars.[16] Thus from a development perspective this enormous transfer of resources from the wealthier to the more impoverished regions of the world represents a singular opportunity for improving the well-being of the poorer involved. In fact, the benefits of migration to families, communities and the state are manifest. Researches focusing on households with relatives working abroad found out that

> When migrants' economic prospects improve, they send more money home. In turn, the recipient households use these resources to make crucial investments for the future, leading to increased child schooling, reduced child labor, and greater entrepreneurial activity in migrants' source households.[17]

But, despite the gains of remittances, other studies show that there is not much tremendous improvement in the lives of the families, since the money being sent is just enough or sometimes could hardly meet the demands and needs of the families left behind.[18] There are a lot of stories that illustrate the realities faced by the left-behind families including how they manage the remittances which are hardly enough to sustain their daily needs especially if the remittances have been delayed. In line with this, Edillon[19] asserted that there is not really much of a significant difference with regard to the family's economic status as they remain poor. Hence, other priorities such as health considerations including hygiene-related health problems are taken for granted and visit to doctors only occur when very ill, just the same as to the non-migrant poor. They are also vulnerable to "economic shocks" especially related to the country's economic and political situation.

An article written by Jeremiah Opiniano[20] demonstrates that extreme reliance on money from Filipino overseas has not helped the country get out of the poverty. The 2006 FIES (Family Income and Expenditures Survey) showed that there were 27.6 million poor Filipinos (an increased 3.6 million from 2003 survey). Though it does not discount the fact that remittances have positive and significant effects on the well-being of poor households, but in terms of regional development, it does not benefit low-income house-

16. A complete and accurate table of remitances can be found at <http://bsp.gov.ph/statistics/keystat/ofw.htm>.

17. D. Yang, "How Remittances Help Migrant Families," at <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/how-remittances-help-migrant-families>.

18. C. Arellano with A. Bulíř, T. Lane, and L. Lipschitz, "The Dynamic Implications of Foreign Aid and its Variability," *Journal of Development Economics*, 2007, 88: 87–102.

19. R. G. Edillon, "The Effects of Parent's Migration on Children Left Behind," at <www.unicef.org/social-policy/.../Philippines_The_Effects_of_Parents_ Migration_of_children_left_behind>.

20. J. Opiniano, "Stories Faraway Filipino," cited in "Migration and Filipino Children Left-Behind: A Literature Review" by M. M. Reyes at <www.unicef. org/ philippines/Synthesis_StudyJuly12008.pdf>.

hold as much as higher income families. In another article Soledad Rica R. Llorente[21] also talks about the economic benefits and social cost of remittances in relation to migration which due to their increase, overseas Filipinos have been given the label *"bagong bayani"* or modern-day heroes. However, the social cost of migration is also something that needs serious attention.

Economics may focus more on the impact of remittances which include not only the increase in the country's GNP but also better standard of living of the migrant families, good education opportunities of children, and assistance to community development, among others. The unfortunate reality which may not be measurable by money (and which cannot be bought by any currency) is the impact of migration to families left behind especially on children. There has been several studies to show that migration of parents is indeed heart breaking for children.

Longing for Parental Care

Though family separation may not necessarily lead to extreme cases of emotional disturbance and delinquency among children, they have different levels of acceptance and tolerance of the migration depending on their "cognitive development."[22] For young children, they see this as an abandonment and not seeing the other side of the picture; it could however have either a positive or negative effect for the adolescents—somewhat happy because of the material benefits but the painful one is they cannot hide their sadness.[23] But regardless of the material benefits and possibly the care that these children left behind received from their parents from a distance or from their relatives, children of migrant, particularly of migrant mothers, still consider the migration as a form of abandonment. Children have much higher expectations from mothers to provide care for the family even if they are working abroad. Though they recognize the economic benefits they are gaining, they do not recognize this as a form of care.[24] This situation is also consistent with Battistella and Conaco's study[25] which reveals that parental absence is experienced particularly as a sense of loneliness and abandonment and that children left behind generally lagged behind their classmates with both parents present.

On the level of psychological and emotional well-being, children of migrants revealed that they were less socially adjusted. Children with the mother abroad tend to be more

21. S. R. Llorente, "A Futuristic Look into the Filipino Diaspora: Trends, Issues, and Implications," at <http://www. pacificrim.usfca.edu/research/perspectives>.

22. Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Hearts Apart: Migration in the Eyes of Filipino Children* (Manila: CBCP, 2004).

23. See Ma. L. A. Carandang, ed., "*Nawala ang Ilaw ng Tahanan*" *in Case Studies of Families Left Behind by OFW Mothers* (Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, Inc., 2007), 22.

24. R. S. Parreñas, "The Gender Paradox in the Transnational Families of Filipino Migrant Women," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal,* 2005, 14/3.

25. G. Battistella and M. C. G. Conaco, "Impact of Migration on the Children Left Behind," *Asian Migrant,* 1996/9, quoted in M. M. Reyes, "Migration and Filipino Children Left-Behind: A Literature Review," at <www.unicef.org/philippines/Synthesis_StudyJuly12008.pdf>.

angry, confused, apathetic and more afraid than other children. It is also asserted that the absence of the mother could be most disruptive in the life of children.[26] Likewise, children do not want their mother to work overseas.[27] The parents' long period of absence gives an OFW's child a feeling of "permanence of absence," very similar to those experienced by orphans and abandoned children. Most of them have not really gotten to know their parents well because they have not lived with them for years. Children can only associate their parents with the money, gifts, phone calls and now, internet chatting.

Burden of Girl Children in Performing the "Caring" Work

Many young adults who have migrated mothers feel neglected or abandoned. They do not see their fathers as performing the "caring" work in the family, rather they pass over the caring responsibilities to other women in the family, more often to the eldest daughter. This immense responsibility in turn affects their performance in school.[28] As noted in another study, when a mother migrates, the father does not automatically assume the roles previously undertaken by women, hence, it becomes a burden to the girls in the family who assume the role of migrant mothers.[29]

Confusion over Gender Boundaries and Reversal of Gender Roles

It is unfortunate that gender boundaries are very much keen on children's views on parental migration, "children of migrant fathers are more likely to say that their father left the Philippines to provide for the family, whereas children of migrant mothers more commonly claim that their mothers left to escape poverty."[30] This study of Parreñas further shows how the society views the dysfunctional transnational families by blaming the migrant women's disruptions of the gender conventions where there is also a greater demand for children's care expectations from women than from men. And when the father is the one left at home, there is an impact on children of the reversal of roles of fathers from being a main provider to that of a nurturer.[31]

There is also confusion and resentment of children over the transformation of traditional gender roles especially where most fathers refuse to perform nurturing roles even in the absence of the mothers.

26. Ibid.

27. V. P. Cruz, "Seasonal Orphans and Solo Parents: The Impact of Overseas Migration." Scalabrini Migration Center and CBCP Commission on Migration and Tourism, 1987, 9.

28. See R. S. Parreñas, *Children of Global Migration: Transnational Families and Gendered Woes* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2006), 165.

29. M. M. B. Asis, "Imagining the Future of Migration and Families in Asia," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal,* 2000 9/3: 266.

30. See R. S. Parreñas, *Children of Global Migration: Transnational Families and Gendered Woe*, op. cit., 56.

31. A. T. Pingol, *Remaking Masculinities, Power and Gender Dynamics in Families with Migrant Wives and Househusbands* (Quezon City: University Center for Women Studies, University of the Philippines, 2001).

Developing a Consumerist Attitude

Most children accept the migration of their parents as an opportunity to have a better life, they only see the "money equivalent" of migration. As long as they receive their money regularly, they will be fine. This also leads to a materialistic attitude of children of migrants. In the case of seafarers, a study shows that whenever they are not on board the ships, they tend to be shopping. To go shopping is for them a way of coping with loneliness and buying gifts is a way of making up for their absence from their family.

> The gift should also be understood as a "metasocial commentary" to the experience obtained by the seafarer in his maritime career. He brings home exotic artifacts from all over the world—and emphasize simultaneously, since he himself has been to the same places, his own extraordinary knowledge. In short, the gift is in this thesis, treated as a medium for and an exemplification of the contact between the seafarer on board ship and the family members at home. He conjures up the memory of those back home with the help of the mnemonic qualities of the gifts, and they see his imprint in the exotic gifts while he is away. He purchases physical bearers, which are capable of carrying the memory of the family at home, and ends up by presenting them as gifts, as pieces of himself to family members after terminating his contract.[32]

The Emotional Distress of Mothering from a Distance

In one of her studies, Parreñas shows how most of the Filipino mothers working abroad are trapped in the painful contradiction of feeling the distance from their families and having to depend on the material benefits of their separation. The common emotional strains of transnational mothering includes feelings of anxiety, helplessness, loss, guilt and the burden of loneliness to which they negotiate in three different ways: the commodification of love; the repression of emotional strains; and the rationalization of distance. Thus, in using such coping mechanisms, the women justify their decision of leaving their children behind in the Philippines by highlighting the material gains for the family. And they struggle to maintain a semblance of family life by rationalizing distance and keeping regular communication. A great sense of loss is experienced by the mothers who miss the growing years of their children. Often mothers leave while children are still small and they re-unite when they are already teenagers causing the mothers to feel an insurmountable loss over their prolonged separation.

The pain is usually aggravated by caretaking tasks of domestic work. Taking care of children is not just taking care of children when in the process of doing so, one cannot take care of one's own. This contradiction accentuates the pain of domestic work and results in the simultaneous aversion and desire for such job. Ruby Mercado, a domestic

32. G. M. Lamvik, "The Filipino Seafarer: A Life Between Sacrifice and Shopping," *Anthropology in Action. Journal for Applied Anthropology in Policy and Practice*, 2012, 19/1: 30.

helper, illustrates this with her own experience. In her words, "Domestic work is depressing… you especially miss your children. I do not like taking care of other children when I could not take care of my own. It hurts too much." Yet, it is also true that while some workers resolve this tension by avoiding child care, many also resolve it by pouring love into what they do. This is the case of Trinidad Borromeo who states, "When I take care of an elderly I treat her like she is my own mother."

Another common way of coping with the emotional tension of mothering from a distance is by "commodifying" love. Thus, it is common to hear from mothers that they buy everything their children need or they give everything the children want. Again Ruby testifies:

> All the things that my children needed I gave to them and even more because I know that I have not fulfilled my motherly duties completely. Because we were apart, there have been needs that I have not met. I try to hide that gap by giving them all the material things that they desire and want. I feel guilty because as a mother I have not been able to care for their daily needs. So, because I am lacking in giving them maternal love, I fill that gap with many material goods.[33]

What several studies show is that mothers do not abandon their children upon migration. They not even pass down all their responsibilities to other members of the family left in the Philippines. Instead, they not only reconstitute mothering by providing acts of care from afar, but also do so by overcompensating for their physical absence and performing a transnational version of what is identified as "intensive mothering."[34]

THE STATE'S COMMITMENT TO THE FAMILY

The present Philippine Constitution is composed by 18 articles, one of which (Article XV) is dedicated solely to the family. Through it the State recognizes the Filipino family as the foundation of the nation. Accordingly, the State shall strengthen its solidarity and actively promote its total development. Furthermore, marriage, as an inviolable social institution, is the foundation of the family and shall be protected by the State. In connection with this, the State shall defend: (1) The right of spouses to found a family in accordance with their religious convictions and the demands of responsible parenthood; (2) The right of children to assistance, including proper care and nutrition, and special protection from all forms of neglect, abuse, cruelty, exploitation and other conditions prejudicial to their development; (3) The right of the family to a family living wage and income; and (4) The right of families or family associations to participate in the planning and implementation of policies and programs that affect them. And finally the Article XV states that the fam-

33. Interview done by R. S. Parreñas, "Mothering from a distance: Emotions, Gender, and Intergenerational Relations in Filipino Transnational Families," *Feminist Studies*, 2001, 27/2: 361.

34. S. Heys, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood,* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1996), 10.

ily has the duty to care for its elderly members but the State may also do so through just programs of social security.[35]

Apart from the Constitution, *The Family Code of the Philippines* stands as the most authoritative document which regulates all marriage unions and separations, further defines the family, clarifies who are its official members, indicates the duties and responsibilities of each one, designates the ranks of authority and instructs on issues related to house properties and other material possessions. Both documents are permeated by Christian values and, in some instances, resemble the Catholic Code of Canon Law.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S CONCERN FOR THE FAMILY

The Church's concern for the family can be illustrated by the Pastoral Letter "Save the Family and Live" of 1993 and the Pastoral Statement "Saving and Strengthening the Filipino Family" of 2001, both issued by the CBCP (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines). The first was triggered by the United Nations declaration that 1994 would be a year dedicated to the family and the latter was part of the commemoration of *Familiaris Consortio's* (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World) twentieth anniversary.

Alarmed by the UN's declared openness to welcome and to give recognition to a diversity of family forms, the Catholic Church in the Philippines, through the above mentioned Pastoral Letter, expressed its welcoming attitude towards the UN's year of the family and took it as an opportunity to clarify its perspective on marriage and family which is strictly a stable union between a man and a woman in view of children. Anything else is to be understood as a deviation and untruth about the family. It was also an opportunity to make official its objection against some government policies seen as potentially destructive to the family.

> We wish to register our strong and qualified objection to actions of the government and its intrumentalities which (despite any contrary intentions) work towards the destruction of the Filipino family. The blatant promotion of direct contraception and direct sterilization which separate the two aspects of the conjugal act—the expression of love and openness to the transmission of life—is contrary to the will of God. Already, the evil spawned by these practices have been abundantly demonstrated by the experience of many nations where contraception has been met with common acceptance. The acceptance of abortion, the breakdown of families, the encouragement of pre-marital-sex, the increased incidence of sexually transmitted deceases are only some of the evil consequences. We especially object to the promotion of contraception as an abrasive act of insensitivity to the sentiments of the majority Church whose ethical principles prohibit such practice. This insensitivity is compounded with

35. See the 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines.

> injustice when the promotion of contraception is accompanied by undue pressure on health care workers to do acts which their own consciences dictate to be wrong. We ask our people… to stand up in a united way for the teachings of the Church on contraception, sterilization and abortion, and to refuse to promote contraception, sterilization and abortion should they be ordered to do so by their superiors. There are times when we must bear witness to Christ and dare to say, "We must obey God rather than men" (*Acts* 5:29).[36]

The next pastoral statement also urges the Filipino people to beware of social situations that can destroy or at least deform the family. It laments that today many Catholics live together without the benefit of a Church marriage, thus depriving themselves of the sacrament of marriage and the sacramental grace they need in order to carry out their responsibilities as Christian couples and parents. Often, there is little preparation for marriage, and couples are rushing into marriage without really knowing each other's values that would firmly preserve their marriage through periods of hardship and pain. Pre-marital pregnancy and elopement are sadly common. Economic factors threaten the unity of marriage. The forced separation of a husband from his wife or of both from their children due to overseas work is causing great suffering in the family. In all cases, the children suffer most. In many cases they suffer serious psychological harm. Sometimes, separation results in the break-up of families.

The bishops also denounced the infidelities of some public officials and media personalities which cause grave scandal and at the same time lead to a lowering of the esteem regarding marital fidelity. Furthermore, eroticism in our society in the form of various levels of pornography is also weakening the marriage bond as well as the sense of the sacredness of the gift of sexuality. Drug trafficking, the use of illegal drugs, and drug related crimes contribute to the destruction of peace and unity in the family and in the community. They go on to note that so-called modern ideas from supposedly developed countries penetrate the Filipino culture through mass media and insidiously deform family values and degrade the traditional esteem for marriage, family, and human life.

> Compounding our tragedy today is the fact that our legislators have introduced proposals that, we firmly believe, will ultimately destroy the family as our religious faith understands it. Now in the legislature are bills allowing absolute divorce, removing the constitutional prohibition of abortion, and more aggressively pushing population control through contraception, sterilization and, yes, even abortion. We hear suggestions about same sex unions as the basis for alternative families. In schools are programs of sex education that fail to inculcate the values that would safeguard life and the sacredness of the gift of sex.[37]

36. A Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines on the Family. *Save the Family and Live*. C. D. F. Morelos, Bishop of Butuan, CBCP, 13 July, 1993.

37. A CBCP Pastoral Statement on the Twentieth Anniversary of *Familiaris Consortio. Saving and Strengthening the Filipino Family*. O. B. Quevedo, Archbishop of Cotabato President CBCP, 2 December, 2001.

Re-echoing the teachings of *Familiaris Consortio,*[38] the document enumerates four tasks for the Filipino family: The first is "to live in fidelity the reality of communion" (*FC* 18) between husband and wife as well as between parents and their children. Communion is founded on love. Marriage is a covenant of love between husband and wife. By such a covenant, they "are no longer two but one flesh." Thus, from the beginning, marriage is indissoluble. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder.

Conjugal communion is the basis of communion between parents and children, between sisters and brothers. It is love that animates the interpersonal relationships of the different members of the family. In receiving the Sacraments as a gift of the Holy Spirit, the family is linked with Christ and the people of God by the natural communion of love. Day by day the members of the family must build up this communion of persons by their "care and love of the little ones, the sick, the aged," by their sharing of goods, of joys and of sorrows. Only through a great spirit of sacrifice, forbearance, pardon and reconciliation can family communion be preserved and perfected.

The second task of the family is to serve life. Husband and wife are cooperators in the love of God the Creator. They cooperate in transmitting by procreation the divine image from person to person. This gift of life is not only physical. It is "enlarged and enriched by all those fruits of moral, spiritual and supernatural life which they hand to their children and through the children to the Church and to the world" (*FC* 28). Parents also serve life by educating their children. They have the primary responsibility of educating their children in the essential values of human life, such as a correct attitude of freedom, a sense of true justice, and even more importantly a sense of true love, especially of the poor. The family is the first and fundamental school of social living. It is the task of parents to give their children a clear and delicate sex education that brings them to a knowledge of and respect for the moral norms that guarantee responsible personal growth in human sexuality.

The third and fourth tasks of the Christian family are: participation in the development of society and sharing in the life and mission of the Church respectively. The very experience of communion and sharing that should characterize the family's daily life represents its first and fundamental contribution to society. This authentic communion is a stimulus for the broader community relationships marked by respect, justice, dialogue and love. As a consequence, the bishops strongly advocate family politics, by which families politically intervene so that the laws and institutions of the State not only do not offend but support and positively protect the rights and duties of the family. By family politics they assume responsibility for transforming society and fulfill the kingly mission of service in which Christian couples share by virtue of the sacrament of marriage.

In serving the Church, families share in the Church's mission. Such service should follow a community pattern: the spouses together as a couple, the parents and children

38. See <http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html>

as a family. The family expresses and realizes its participation in the prophetic, priestly, and kingly mission of Jesus Christ and of his Church through the love between husband and wife and between members of the family. The witnessing of such love by the family demonstrates that the family is both a believing and evangelizing community.

Today, in practically all dioceses in the Philippines, there are diocesan and parish programs of Family and Life. These help parents fulfill their duties and responsibilities toward their families, toward the Church and toward society. In the context of Church activities one can easily see Catholic movements like the Parish Renewal Experience (PREX), Christian Family Movement (CFM), Human Life International (HLI), Marriage Encounter groups (ME), Couples for Christ (CFC), Familia, Abay Familia, and many other similar groups doing their part in renewing and uplifting the quality of the society's political, economic, and moral life. The Church always hopes to help couples in an even greater measure to achieve the tasks assigned to Christian families.

Finally, the bishops ask the families to be active agents in promoting social justice and eradication of poverty:

> We strongly urge all Filipinos, especially those already engaged in the family apostolate, to direct their special attention to two concerns. The first is poverty. Poverty is the silent killer of families. It forces many spouses to separate for purposes of work. It makes them vulnerable to pressures that ruin their esteem for life. Destitution makes it difficult and sometimes almost impossible for them to observe the divine law (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1887*)*. Poverty is not God's will. Poverty is an enemy of love and life. In many ways it is contrary to human dignity. We must work to eradicate it. In a country where the great divide between the many poor and the few rich seems unbridgeable, we must all work toward social justice, the justice of the common good, the justice that morally demands equitable distribution of the country's goods. We call on government to put into practice what it has declared as a policy, namely, poverty eradication. Special priority must be given to housing, education, and medical care for the poor. We also call upon government leaders to eradicate graft and corruption since this terrible social injustice is nothing else but thievery of the grossest kind, the stealing of incredible amounts of public funds that could have benefited millions of our poor people. We call upon business leaders to place the interests of the poor above the natural desire to earn the greatest profit. We urge everyone who has the means, to help set up livelihood and employment opportunities especially in these difficult times. Our final destiny is determined by what we do to the poor. Christ said, "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did it for me… Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me" (*Matthew* 25:40,45*)*.[39]

39. Ibid.

The Catechism for Filipino Catholics in its section dedicated to family and sanctity of life also offer some disconcerting questions:

> As Filipinos we are noted for our love of family. Our lives, everything we are and have, are due ultimately to our birth, upbringing and support of our families. It is from our families that we first learn respect for human life… But if we indeed have such a high regard for life, then why is it treated so cheaply among us? Why is it not given the value and respect that we say we put on it as a people? And if it is true that the Filipino family plays a pivotal role in the life of the individual and society, why are infidelities and broken homes becoming more and more common, specially among the urban, higher income Catholic families?[40]

In his visit to the Philippines (January 15–19, 2015) Pope Francis had an audience with thousands of Filipino families and on that occasion he admonished them to be aware of the new ideological colonization that tries to destroy the family. It is not, he said, born of the dream that we have from God and prayer—it comes from outside and that's why I call it a colonization. Let us not lose the freedom to embrace the mission God has given us, the mission of the family. And just as our peoples were able to say in the past "No" to the period of colonization, as families, we have to be very wise and strong to say "No" to any attempted ideological colonization that could destroy the family. The Pope then pointed to the heart of the problem:

> The pressures on family life today are many. Here in the Philippines, countless families are still suffering from the effects of natural disasters. The economic situation has caused families to be separated by migration and the search for employment, and financial problems strain many households. While all too many people live in dire poverty, others are caught up in materialism and lifestyles which are destructive of family life and the most basic demands of Christian morality. The family is also threatened by growing efforts on the part of some to redefine the very institution of marriage, by relativism, by the culture of the ephemeral, by a lack of openness to life.[41]

THE FUTURE OF THE FAMILY

It is just natural that writers attempt to predict what the family of the future will be and in doing so they roughly fall within one of two groups: those who are more pessimists and see what is happening in and to the families with alarm. They affirm that the high rates of delinquency, separation, desertion, extra-marital affairs, and sex outside marriage are signs that the family is in danger of extinction. Others, however are more optimistic and

40. See *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (Manila: Word & Life Publications, 1997), 998.

41. Pope Francis' message at the Mall of Asia Arena in the Philippines. At <http://www.philstar.com/full-text-pope-francis-message-families-moa-arena>.

don't think that the family is heading towards an imminent collapse.[42] If society would be more stable and homogeneous also the family and other institutions would be better integrated. But in a rapidly changing society, values, norms and actual behavior tend to conflict with one another since institutions and the various segments of society do not change at a uniform rate, ones faster than others.

> Rapid social change, therefore, makes traditional norms increasingly inadequate or sometimes causes them to come in conflict with new models of conduct. Consequently, family and family controls are weakened and sometimes lead to individualized or deviant behavior. This brings about misunderstandings between husband and wife which may ultimately result in marital tension or separation and could bring about some problems with the children such as truancy, teenage pregnancy, delinquency or drug addiction. Rapid social change may also widen the rift between parents and children. Young people are more exposed and more open to modern ways and ideas while older people tend to be more conservative. Thus parents may be seen as "old-fashioned" and obsolete in their values and attitudes while children are referred to as "wild, spoiled, and disobedient." In some cases, this generation gap has led to serious family conflict.[43]

There is in the Philippines a diversity of family forms where traditional and liberal views co-exist causing ambivalence and ambiguities in family patterns and relationships. The "permissive" revolution ended up producing counter revolutionary movements and reactions such as campaigns against abortion, contraception and pornography. Marital separation, desertion and abandonment gave rise to pro-life movements and rallies.

As to the question whether the family will survive, most researchers still seem to answer in the affirmative. In fact most people believe in the value of a family and continue getting married and having children. Jocano,[44] for instance, notices that the rural and peasant family is still the basic building block of Philippine society as shown by the pervasiveness of familial influence in the conduct of daily affairs. In fact, the Philippine social organization could be described as "familial" in nature, since almost all activities in the community whether business, agriculture, religion, politics, etc., still center on the family.

Other research findings stress the persistence of family ties and traditional values despite modernization and urbanization. Miralao,[45] for instance, affirms that extended families actually continue thriving in the city due to mutual aid and assistance among

42. A. S. Skolnick, *The Intimate Environment, Exploring Marriage and the Family* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 26.

43. B. T. G. Medina, *The Filipino Family*, op. cit., 289.

44. L. F. Jocano, "Filipino Family Values." In A. E. Perez, ed., *The Filipino Family: A Spectrum of Views and Issues* (Manila: University of the Philippines Office of Research Coordination and University of the Philippines Press, 1995), 2–3.

45. V. A. Miralao, "The Family, Traditional Values and the Socio Cultural Transformation of Philippine Society," *Philippine Sociological Review,* 1997, 45: 198–99.

family and kindred. Even now, one doesn't need much effort to notice the strong linkages and mutual support between family members here and across the seas, whether due to contract work or permanent immigration abroad. Furthermore, the Philippines has the highest incidence of elderly persons living with at least one child, compared to several neighboring countries. The Philippines also holds a high score in terms of physical, mental and emotional health, and this is attributed in great part to financial support and regular interaction with children and other relatives.[46]

Since the family is also an economic unit, its future will depend a lot on how this country is going to handle the issue of poverty. Poverty certainly causes a negative impact on the family, inflicting terrible wounds on its members who sadly, many times, never completely recover! The fact that of the nations of Southeast Asia, the Philippines ranks among the highest in the dispersal of its citizens throughout the world is as usual attributed to poverty. Yet, this phenomenon of dispersion going on in the twenty-first century calls for an understanding that goes beyond the issue of poverty itself. Is it really poverty what drives the Filipinos to leave their family and homeland to seek their fortunes anywhere throughout the world? Archbishop Socrates Villegas gives his contribution in seeking understanding:

> Many Filipinos who are abroad are nurses, teachers and other professionals, among these, engineers and agriculturists. They are therefore not at the bottom of the economic scale. In fact, as professionals they would not have really been hungry had they remained home in the Philippines. In dialogues with Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), it has become clear that many who have sought employment abroad have done so because they feel, rightly or wrongly, that in the Philippines, they do not get what they deserve. The phenomenon of the nursing profession makes for an interesting case study. At one time, the Philippines fielded nurses all over the world, and till the present, many nurses in the United States and in Europe are Filipinos. And as schools of nursing proliferated in the Philippines, we overstocked the labor market with nurses and really killed the proverbial goose that lays the golden egg. There has been a deleterious slump in the demand for Filipino nurses. Many schools of nursing have closed down, and graduates of the nursing curriculum have had to seek employment as call-center agents, sales representatives, etc. The point seems to be clear: In the Filipino psyche is a romanticized notion of the West as the land of opportunity accompanied by a deprecatory assessment of the Philippine situation. It is not really poverty alone, nor perhaps principally, that sunders families. It is rather the idealization of the West—and, for non-professionals, or manual laborers, the Middle East—as the land of promise. Many marriages are threatened by the separation of couples owing to overseas employment of one or the other spouse;

46. M. A. Costello, "The Elderly in Filipino Households: Current Status and Future Prospects," *Philippine Sociological Review,* 1994, 42: 53–77.

this peculiarity of the national social psyche is threatening for it can only mean that not even the family is a powerful enough factor to keep Filipinos home, especially when, we observe that the Filipinos who pack their bags and seek employment abroad are not really impoverished Filipinos. There is no doubt that the unprincipled aggressive recruitment policies of many Western corporations and business establishments, eager for cheap labor, induce Filipinos with dreams of immediate, though unrealistic, prosperity. Talk to any OFW and you will be impressed at the grasp he or she has of terms relating to placement fees, payment schemes, salaries, benefits, wages, privileges… all these, obviously the result of sweetened deals packaged so as to attract cheap Filipino labor to countries where a successful birth-control program has a very thin younger sector to take care of an increasingly aging population! This takes us to a more involved sociological issue that the Philippine church must resolutely and studiously confront: Does the family still matter to the Filipino, and does it matter sufficiently to come before every other consideration that may sacrifice the unity of the family? To cling to idyllic pictures from the past of members of the family cohesively constituting an economic unit working not only in proximity to each other but living under the same roof will be a disservice to a Church that is sparing nothing to be more effective in its pastoral care for members of the family. It would be presumptuous to offer a definitive answer to this question, but the matter has to be raised, and the problem, addressed. Does the Filipino find in family ties and bonds a value so high that others, including the prospect of higher salaries and more comfortable living, can be sacrificed for? And if the Filipino's valuation of the family has suffered a downturn, what can the Philippine Church do about it? Obviously, the Philippine phenomenon is also symptomatic of a universal phenomenon: a re-thinking and a re-shaping of elemental units, the family principally among them. And while many Filipino OFW will declare that the sacrifice of living apart from spouse and children is one they willingly make "for the sake of the family," one wonders what notion of family life and what norms of family membership Filipinos have when they are willing to forego conjugal cohabitation, miss out on the childhood and adolescence of their children and become strangers to their own families—while they make a pile abroad.[47]

CONCLUSION

The family is an institution which struggles to adjust to the social, economic and political systems of the larger society. Family relations, structures and activities must often be modified in order to meet new needs and situations. Just to underscore some, gender

47. Archbishop Socrates Villegas, CBCP President. Speech delivered during the *Synod on the Family*. October 16, 2014, Rome, at <http://www.cbcpnews.com/cbcpnews/?p=43254>.

roles and parenting tasks have been greatly modified as a consequence of the country's response to economic crisis. However, the family is not merely a passive force in society; it can also be a birthplace and initiator of social change.

While family values and norms are derived from the general culture of the community, the prevailing type of family system and practices can produce changes in society. This is due to the fact that the family shapes the personality and character of young people. In so molding and forming individuals, the family produces people with certain values, attitudes and skills which can influence the functioning of other institutions. Indeed, it is the family which launches young people into their adult occupations and channels their initial contacts with the outside world. Consequently, the relationship between family and other social institutions is reciprocal in the sense that structural changes in society bring about changes in the family, and changes in the family also influence other social institutions. While the family is adaptive it is also conservative; it has a great capacity for adaptation to the different circumstances and demands of history, yet it has also an equally great capacity to retain traditional values and norms amidst the constant changes in society. By providing adequate pastoral care to the families of this country, the Church can greatly contribute to the quality of other major institutions and offer a great service to both individuals and the society at large.

In its Constitution, the State recognizes the Filipino family as the foundation of the nation and affirms that marriage is the family's foundation. Nobody seems to doubt that the family still has a foundational role in society; but what about marriage? Are we heading toward a future in which marriage will no longer be the foundation of a family? Once marriage is disregarded, on what will the family anchor itself? As reminded by the great master Confucius, for as long as personal lives are well cultivated and hearts set right there will be hope. Yet, that is precisely what José Rizal lamented: the hearts of people in his land were not set right.

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Taiwan

Luigino Marchioron

"Change" (*gai bian* 改變) and "transformation" (*zhuan bian* 轉變) are the most used words to analyze the characteristics of the family in Taiwan.[1] This paper will examine some "changes" of the Taiwanese family in the context of demographic variations, anthropological characteristics and cultural transformations. The analysis will take into account both Taiwan as a frontier and an immigrant society of mainland China[2] and the aborigine society (*Yuan Zhu Min* 原住民).[3]

1. For the purpose of gathering some documentation, from July 2014 to June 2015, I collected all the information related to Family issues published by the two leading English newspapers in Taiwan: T*he China Post* (*zhong guo you bao* 中國郵報) and the *Taipei Times* (*tai bei shi bao* 台北時報). Without being complete, the records reflect meaningful concerns about the Taiwanese families.

2. A major Han (漢) immigration began in the seventeenth century. The Han is the largest ethnic group in China mainland. The Taiwanese society comprises: Taiwanese (including Hakka) 84 percent, mainland Chinese 14 percent, Aborigine 2 percent.

3. Yuan Zhu Min (原住民) literally means "original inhabitants". The term is used to indicate the indigenous peoples of Taiwan who constitute about 2

Having in mind that the family structure varies significantly by region (for example, Taipei, the Capital city in the northern region and the southern part), ethnic groups and traditional beliefs, the paper will consider how the proportions of nuclear family, in Taiwan, have been visibly reduced.[4] Although most women eventually get married, the age at time of marriage increased and so did the divorce rate.

The main body of this essay, after having reflected on the recognition of the identity and dignity of women in the Taiwanese society, will analyze some challenges Taiwanese people face: the promotion of a model of economy (*jing ji kun nan* 經濟困難) that sacrifices families,[5] the highly competitive market with consequences on time consuming work (*hao shi gong zuo* 耗時工作), the general and endemic sense of "pressure" (*ya li* 壓力), urbanization (*du shi hua* 都市化), the fall in the birthrate (*chu sheng lu* 出生率), domestic violence (*jia ting bao li* 家庭暴力), the incidence of single-parent families (*dan qin jia ting* 單親家庭), the promotion of "diverse family formation" (*duo yuan cheng jia* 多元成家),[6] and "virtualization" (*xu ni hua* 虛擬化).[7]

The results indicate that although the family remains at the core of cultural values in Taiwan and one of the most precious factors for the fulfilment and happiness of a person and the society itself, the social and cultural changes demand new bonds, cohesion, and supportive responsibility to consolidate the fragmented and fragile family. Taiwanese

percent of the Taiwanese population, or around 530,000 indigenous people in Taiwan, and nearly half of them live in cities instead of rural areas. The ancestors of these ethnical communities may have been living in Taiwan for approximately 8,000 years before the Han immigration. As of June 2014, 16 tribes have been recognized. *The China Post*, 17 March, 2014.

4. Later in the '60s and '70s, many North American anthropologists came to Taiwan to do fieldworks on the Chinese Family since they could not enter into mainland China. The results of their dissertations, often published, underlined the steadily "transformation" of the traditional Taiwanese family, that is, the "extended families" or "extended household" ("multi-generation extended households"), in contrast with the "nuclear families," which were considered "an imitation of the Western society". The "extended family," that is, seniors (the parents of the wife, the parents of the husband, and in some cases grandparents) living (co-residence) with their children has dropped substantially in recent years. The "extended household" is becoming less important in Taiwan. Between 1961 and 1973, rapid economic growth generated a noteworthy trend of rural-to-urban migration, especially migration to the northern and southern areas of the country. The oil shocks of 1974 and 1979 and increasing competition from other developing countries forced Taiwan to switch to the development of high-tech industries. The most important was the establishment of a science park in Hsinchu City; in 1980, which is now known as Taiwan's Silicon Valley. At <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/tradition-and-progress-taiwans-evolving-migration-reality>.

5. In the 70s, in order to curtail the population growth, the Taiwanese government promoted a family planning program: "One is not too few; two are just right" (*yi ge bu xian, liang ge qia qia hao* 一個不嫌少, 兩個恰恰好). In 1992 in order to cope with Taiwan's aging population, the government coined a new family planning slogan: "two are just right" (*yie ge bu xian shao, liang ge qia qia hao* 兩個恰恰好). The Taiwanese government's promotion of its population policy and national family planning program twice received top marks from the United States Population Crisis Committee in 1987 and 1992! Cf. AA.VV., *Taiwan, Country Study Guide*, *Vol. 1, Strategic Information and Development* (Washington: International Business Publications, 2013), 79.

6. The expression turns into a "gender manifold diversity" (*duo yuan xing bie de cha yi* 多元性別的差異) which includes the demand to legalize same-sex marriage (*tong xing hun yin he fa hua* 同性婚姻合法化) and recognize "gay families" (*tong zhi jia ting* 同志家庭). Cf. *Taiwan LGBT Family Right Advocacy* (台灣同志家庭權益促進會), at <http://www.lgbtfamily.org.tw>.

people stress the importance of the role of the "constitutional" family to educate their children. Furthermore, the study shows that the society also feels the need to qualify the sense of solidarity towards new forms of cohabitation.

The last part of the article, based on the human and spiritual resources of the Taiwanese family, will suggest some elements to accompany this fundamental institution.

TERMINOLOGY

Family (*jia* 家 or *jia ting* 家庭)[8] has long been a key component within the Chinese society and the most important unity of social organization in Taiwan. The family was, for centuries, the backbone of the Chinese state, and we can still observe its centrality. In the old China, the family was the pillar of the society. Traditional Chinese society is best understood by referring to the "five relationships" (*wu lun* 五倫).[9] The majority of the "five relationships" presented by Confucius were directly centered on family: 1) father-son (*fu zi you qin* 父子有親); 2) husband-wife (*fu fu you bie* 夫婦有別); 3) elder brother-younger brother (*chang you you xu* 長幼有序); 4) ruler-subject (*jun chen you yi* 君臣有義); 5) friend-friend (*peng you you xin* 朋友有信). The Chinese family structure has traditionally been compact and hierarchical. As we can observe, in each of the relationships, the superior member (father, husband, elder brother, ruler and teacher) has the duty of benevolence and care for the subordinate member (son, wife, younger brother, subject, and student). The subordinate member has the duty of deference, obedience and conformity.[10] Within the traditional Chinese family structure, therefore, each member has a specific role and manner of address in Chinese: for older and younger brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandfathers and grandmothers, on both the maternal and paternal sides of a family. These relationships represented the formal "order" of the Chinese society. Its opposite was *luan* (亂), that is "dis-order". The most important virtue in the tradition[11]

7. The spread of the mobile devices (and the myriad of new technologies and social networks) is having a substantial effect on the redefinition of the relationship between "real" and "virtual". When it comes to computer mediated communication, "virtualization" refers to all forms of interaction between individuals in which this interaction is mediated by a computer or a gadget and the multiple possibilities opened up by the Internet. In this "virtual communication," contents, intentions, or actors may also be nonexistent, distorted, replaced, or created - intentionally or unintentionally.

8. The character *jia* (家) first appeared in the Shang Dynasty (商朝, second millennium BC). At that time, it was just a drawing that depicted a house with a pig inside it. The character 家 (*jia*) still contains the two elements: the modern character (宀) represents the roof of a house, and the character 豕 (*shi*) below the roof represents a pig. The first Chinese dictionary defined the character *jia* (家) as "home". In other words, 家 (*jia*) is a place where people live together. People had domesticated animals. Pigs were the most important domestic animals because they were both a major food source and symbol of wealth and social status. The character 庭 (*ting*) depicts the architectural structural of the traditional Chinese "courtyard" (*ting* 庭) house: an arrangement of several individual houses around a "courtyard". Each house belonged to a different family member.

9. A sixth "relationship" has also been added: teacher-student (*lao shi-xue sheng* 老師學生).

10. The only exception might be the relationship between friend and friend (*peng you you xin* 朋友有信), which may actually involve a condition of equality—unless, one is older than the other.

11. A Chinese saying: "Of all virtues, filial piety is the first" (*bai shan xiao wei xian* 百善孝為先).

and pillar of the traditional Chinese family structure was the concept of filial piety (*xiao* 孝):[12] a set of internal dispositions, ritual practices, and behaviors specified in terms of one's care for and duty to one's parents, familial elders and ancestors. The ethics of filial piety requires feeding, obeying and sacrificing.

The Taiwanese family is going through a profound process of diversification. Family relations are no longer hierarchical, but horizontal. There is more equality in the family (between spouses and between children); however, the change in relations between parents and children causes some tensions because the roles, of course, are different. In ancient China, wives were subordinate to their husbands and children obeyed their parents (specifically the father), but now the legislation (June 1998) promotes domestic harmony, prevents domestic violence, and protects the interest of the victim of domestic violence. The legislation more strongly safeguards the education to respect the other[13] rather than the conjugal stability. It reflects the primacy of the rights of the individual, but does not stress family duties. The individual feels more bearer of rights than the family itself. In this context, family can be conceived as a set of individuals and provides service for the fulfillment of the wishes of each member of the family.

Of course, the identification of the fundamental rights of each person (adults, minors...) is always positive as it resolves the issue of the systematic negation of the individual in cultural and political patterns of the past. However, there is also the risk that the individual rights will prevail over the profound bond and cohesiveness of the family conceived as the place where we take care of each other and feel responsible for each other. The new relation between men and women has effectively improved in terms of equality. Although modern contemporary culture has opened new spaces, new forms of freedom and new depths, the hierarchical roles within the couple have been substituted by a relation where everything is discussed and negotiated. Domination and control, nevertheless, have not disappeared and conjugal violence, in Taiwan, remains as one of the principal causes for divorce and marital failures.

A society where everything was regulated by a hierarchical authority to the *primacy of the individual* is facing the challenges of the opposite extremes.

Families, therefore, are a kind of mirror of society, the key to happiness, but also the crossroad to all human fragilities.

THE CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

On 9 June, 2015, the family psychotherapist Prof. Zheng Yu Ying (鄭玉英)[14] warmly wel-

12. Filial piety is illustrated by the Chinese character (*xiao* 孝). The character is a combination of the upper character 老 (*lao*, which means "old") and the lower character 子 (*zi*, which means "son"): a son is giving support to a long-haired old man.

13. A very important dimension because the dignity of each person is the foundation for respect.

14. Prof. Zheng Yu Ying（鄭玉英） is a family therapist working in Taipei; she is a member of Taiwan Philosophical Counseling Association (臺灣諮商學會) and actively involved at the Holy Family Church's

comed me for a conversation on Taiwanese families. During the encounter, I took some notes of her invaluable, humble and profound experience of accompanying Taiwanese families.

She pointed out that 1949[15] is an important time to start to talk about the major changes of the traditional family (*chuan tong jia ting* 傳統家庭) in Taiwan. There was a "tradition" (*chuan tong* 傳統) that had been brought to Taiwan from mainland China and "entered" into the life and tradition of local and indigenous people, that is the Taiwanese people.

During these 60 years, one of the most radical changes is the shift of the former patriarchal structure of the family which followed the traditional concept that men were superior to women (*nan zun nu bei* 男尊女卑). Women were considered very low, with very little education. They were seen as a property of men and relegated to second place.

Child-Bride

Poverty and a high birth rate also strengthened the common practice of "child-bride" (*tong yang xi* 童養媳). A girl was taken into a family *as daughter-in-law to be* or "child bride". It was a very painful experience for the little girls because most of the time they were abused or mistreated. They were ordered to make meals, do the laundry, etc.

Starting from as young as three years old, a little girl was trained to become the future *xi fu* (媳婦) that is, the son's wife, experiencing the possibility that the husband would not like her. She was like a servant or employee. In this environment she grew up with "her" husband. Many of today's Taiwanese grandmothers faced this reality.

Little Husband

In mainland China there was a similar practice called "little husband" (*xiao zhang fu* 小丈夫), that is, a mother used to find a little girl for her son. For example, a ten year old son was given a twelve year old girl to act as if she were his elder sister (*zi zi* 姊姊) with the responsibility of taking care of him. Once they reached sexual maturity, the two married. If the husband did not like her, a second or third marriage was consummated. This practice again reveals how from a very tender age girls were abused and enslaved.

There is a Chinese adage which reflects that miserable condition of women's life: "A concubine is better than a wife, a servant girl is better than a concubine, a prostitute is better than a servant girl" (*qi bu ru qie, qie bu ru bei, bei bu ru ji* 妻不如妾, 妾不如婢, 婢

Parish in Taipei. She translated the book of J. Bradshaw, *The Family—A revolutionary Way of Self-Discovery* (Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications, 1988) into Chinese. The title of the Chinese translation is *Family can Hurt People. A New Opportunity to Be Born Again* (家庭會傷人. 自我重生的新契機).

15. In December 1949, Chiang Kai Shek—known as Jiang Zhong Zheng (蔣中正) or Jiang Jie Shi (蔣介石)—evacuated his government from mainland China to Taiwan and made Taipei the temporary capital of the *Republic of China* (also called the "wartime capital"). Some two million people, consisting mainly of soldiers, members of the ruling Kuomintang (中國國民黨) and intellectual and business elites, were evacuated from mainland China to Taiwan at that time, adding to the earlier population of approximately six million.

不如妓).[16] The adage corresponds to the saying: "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence".

The Rapeseed

Taiwanese people use the image of the rapeseed (*you ma cai zi* 油麻菜籽) whose seeds are scattered by wind, birds or people and pollinate where they have been dispersed as a metaphor to indicate the fate of women determined by others and their little value in the family: this little girl or little seed dispersed elsewhere after having acted as the elder sister of the future husband, eventually became his wife, that is, the first wife (*yuan pei* 原配).

Being the first wife, she had a kind of authority, however the mother-in-law (*po po* 婆婆) would also abuse her daughter-in-law (*xi fu* 媳婦). Her destiny was always in the hands of others. After the death of her mother-in-law the wife had the possibility to become the mother and the mother-in-law.

The Uterine Family

The young wife (daughter-in-law) was considered the uterine family (*zi gong jia ting* 子宮家庭) although the husband might have loved other women. Her fate was in her own uterus! The children were her "love," however the daughter-in-law or young wife was required to submit to her mother-in-law who always had the last word within an abusive relationship. After the death of the mother-in-law, the pitiful daughter-in-law eventually became the new mother and later the mother-in-law, however she experienced the same lack of respect from her new daughter-in-law.

The above mentioned conditions of life have changed. The new generation of 35–40 year old women and daughters-in-law are much more influential, with a very good education and a profession.[17] Women in the Taiwanese society reveal an image of success, determination, independence and self-sufficient life.[18] The new generations of mothers do not want to walk the same path that their mothers or grandmothers walked. There is a redefinition of the roles outside the traditional models. A new relationship between men

16. The complete adage says: "A concubine is better than a wife, a servant girl is better than a concubine, a prostitute is better than a servant girl, a thief is better than a prostitute, a thief that does not obtain is better than the thief that obtains" (*qi bu ru qie, qie bu ru bi, bi bu ru ji, ji bu ru tou, tou de zhao bu ru tou bu zhao* 妻不如妾,妾不如婢,婢不如妓,妓不如偷,偷得着不如偷不着).

17. This situation is much more evident in the cities. In the rural areas the process is slower. According to the Ministry of Interior (中華民國, 內政部) the percentage of people in Taiwan who have obtained a higher education degree has increased by 15.2 percentage points in the past 10 years amid a drop in the illiterate population, which fell to 1.8 percent at the end of last year. In terms of ages, 28.7 percent of Taiwanese men aged above 40 completed higher education, while 20 percent of Taiwanese women older than 40 years old are in the higher education bracket. However, the percentage of women younger than 40 years old and with a degree in higher education reached 57.2 percent, higher than men's 53.3 percent in the same age group. At <http://www.moi.gov.tw/>.

18. Taiwanese women, however, also need to learn how to deal with a long term experience of humiliation, repression (*ya yi* 壓抑) and anger (*fen nu* 憤怒).

and women is in action. The "marital authority" has been exchanged for the equality of the two sexes, and the concepts of masculinity (*nan xing* 男性) and femininity (*nu xing* 女性) also have been challenged. The risk to go to the opposite extreme is close.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

The Extra-Marital Affair

In recent decades, in the Chinese lexicon a new term has emerged and become part of the common language: *wai yu* (外遇), the extra-marital affair. In a monogamous marriage (*yi fu yi qi zhi* 一夫一妻制) the experience of cheating and being cheated (*wai yu* 外遇), in the past, met with a strong capacity of tolerance and forgiveness. In a monogamous marriage the experience of the so called *"xiao san"* (小三),[19] that is, a "little third one," a "lover," or an "external girl or mistress" is very common, causing a lot of suffering, to the extent that it is "the scare" (*kong huang* 恐慌) of couples and of those who want to get married.

The reality of extra-marital affairs constitutes a prevailing challenge to marriage. When people are asked whether their marriage is a "covenant" (*meng yue* 盟約), that is, a "pledge of life" (*sheng ming de yue* 生命的約), a "pledge of blood," "blood with blood" (*xue de yue* 血的約) or a "contract" (*qi yue* 契約), that is, an "agreement of the law" (*fa lu de yue* 法律的約), many find it difficult to give an answer.[20]

Divorce

The reality of *wai yu* is closely connected with the divorce rate, becoming one of the most important reasons for divorce (*li hun* 離婚).[21] According to data released by the country's Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics (行政院主計總處) a total of 53,599 couples divorced in Taiwan in 2013, or just under 147 per day. In 2013, 30.6 percent

19. There is another popular expression to indicate the *home-wrecker* (the person who causes the breakup of a marriage because of an extra-marital affair)*: xiao wang* (小王), literally it means "the little wang," and it refers to a wife who has an extra-marital affair with another man. "Wang" (王) is one of the most common Chinese surnames.

20. According to the professional experience of the psychotherapist Prof. Zheng Yu Ying (鄭玉英), people, mainly women, after a period of discernment and counseling, going through a process of deepening the knowledge of their personality, their suffering and wounds, discovering their own resources and potentialities, feel the strength to make the personal and free decision to continue to support their marriage. For many of them, the hurting experience of *"wai yu"* (外遇 or extra-marital affair) may also become an opportunity to grow and learn.

21. Taiwanese women are increasingly making personal declarations of independence. Progressively, these breakups are being initiated by women. Fewer married Taiwanese women are tolerating their husbands' extramarital affairs or are willing to live a lifetime with irreconcilable differences. In a society with a tradition of looking the other way at men who have mistresses, more professional women are accepting divorce as a way to get out of unhappy relationships. At the Taipei branch of the Warm Life Association, (台北市晚晴婦女協會), a non-profit organization, is offering legal services and marriage counseling. Divorce laws in Taiwan have historically favored men, who had exclusive rights to all of their wife's property, including her personal belongings, until 1985. Today, women have the right to ask for their belongings and joint property. Cf. Divorce

of divorces were among those married less than five years, with 24,4 percent from those married from five to nine years. Most divorces were by mutual consent, but the number contested in court continues to increase. Almost 9,000 cases went to arbitration in 2013, of which 949 ended in reconciliation.

In the first eleven months of 2013, 49,000 married couples got divorced in Taiwan, equal to an average of 2.3 married couples legally ending their marriages per 1,000 people. Taiwan's divorce rate was higher than Japan's 1.9 in 2012 and Singapore's 1.5 in 2011. Meanwhile, 132,000 couples got married in Taiwan between January and November this year, for a crude marriage rate of 6.2 marriages per 1,000 people. The ratio was lower than the 6.6 marriages per 1,000 people averaged in Taiwan during the 2000–2012 period.[22]

The Millennium Cultural and Educational Foundation in Taiwan (千代文教基金會) in a survey conducted in 2010 showed that 54.9 percent of families face a marriage crisis. The director of research Prof. Hu Zheng Wen (胡正文) pointed out that having a "cold war" is even more "harmful" *(sha shang li* 殺傷力) than disputes, arguments and quarrels (*leng zhan* 冷戰), because emotions (anger) cannot find an appropriate outlet. She indicated that "cold war" is one of the factors that more quickly destabilize families because dialogue and communication are the elements that protect and tie marriages. What surprised the researcher the most was the fact that 54.9 percent of couples when having a dispute or a fight immediately begin a "cold war" replacing communication and dialogue. Prof. Hu (胡正文) indicated that when a couple has an argument, one of the two hides (*dun xing* 遁形) his/her cell phone asking their children to "pass the message on to" and the door of communication remains closed. Individualism (*ge ren zhu yi* 個人主義) and

Rate Arises as More Women Stop Tolerating Unhappy, Unfaithful Unions, at <http://www.international-divorce.com/Taiwan:-Divorce-Rate-Rises>

22. *The China Post*, 4 August, 2014. Taiwan's crude marriage rate was far lower than China's 9.3 in 2010 and Russia's 9.2 in 2011, while slightly lower than 6.8 in the United States in 2011, but higher than that of Japan's 5.3 in 2012 and Singapore's 5,3 in 2011. Whereas, the rate for couples with an overseas spouse, including those from mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau, was 25.2 couples per 1,000, about three times higher than the local 8.4 per 1,000. The average divorce rate in China mainland is about 30 percent, with 43 percent in the cities, 12 percent in the rural areas. That means that in China about 30 percent of marriages end in divorce. According to the People's Republic of China's Ministry of Civil Affairs (*zhong hua ren min he guo min zheng bu* 中华人民共和国民政部), more than 3 million couples applied for divorce in 2012 *(People's Daily Online*, 19 June, 2012): "Today the Ministry of Civil Affairs published the Statistical Report on the Development of Social Service 2012". It revealed that in the year 2012, 3,104,000 couples applied for divorce, an increase of 8 percent, while there are 13,230,000 newly married couples, representing an increase of 1.6 percent. According to the Statistical Report 2011, there were 2,874,000 divorce applications, representing a growth of 7.3 percent, while 13,024,000 couples registered for marriage in 2011. In 2012, the number of 20 to 24 year old Chinese getting married made up the largest proportion, accounting for 35.5 percent of the previous year's total marriage registrations. The figure has decreased by about 1.1 percentage points each year. Meanwhile, the 25–29 age bracket saw an increasing number of marriage registrations last year, up by 0.8 percentage points from the previous year to 34.2 percent. The cities with the highest divorce rate in Mainland China: Beijing (with a rate of 39 percent); Shanghai (with a rate of 38 percent); Shenzhen (with a rate of 36.25 percent); Guangzhou (with a rate of 35 percent); Xiamen (with a rate of 34,9); Nanjing (with a rate of 33.8 percent); Dalian (with a rate of 31 percent); Hangzhou (with a rate of 29 percent); Harbin (with a rate of 28 percent). Cf. Hyacinth, "Marriage and Family in Mainland China Today," *Tripod*, 2014, 34/173: 9.

"cold war" is also a way for the husband and wife to protect his/her own reputation and feelings (*mian zi* 面子).

Furthermore, the surveys show that 44.1 percent of people in Taiwan believe that marriage is the cause of losing a significant part of his/her freedom. 36.6 percent also admit having thought that it would have been better not to get married and that only 35.1 percent has a heart-to-heart talk (*tan xin* 談心) with his/her significant other. 45.1 percent of the couples believe that they have little time to talk with their partners. 47.4 percent admit that they have only embraced their partners a few times.

The lack of a heart-to-heart communication, on one side, and the anger hidden in a "cold war" relationship on the other side, bring many young couples to postpone the decision to have a baby. If the parents, in a family, maintain a "cold war" relationship without being able to talk to solve the dispute, this condition influences and leads children also to live a "cold war" relationship, resulting in increased difficulty for them to build a relationship of trust and confidence.

There are two other aspects the survey revealed: 50.3 percent consider a "shotgun wedding" (*xian shang che hou bu piao* 先上車後補票) acceptable; and 49.3 percent believe that unmarried cohabitation (*wei hun tong ju* 未婚同居) is perfectly normal.

With respect to education within the family, the survey also sheds some light: nearly 60 percent of parents do not know how to educate their children. In addition, they consider that the school only insists on the transmission of "professional" contents and skills to prepare students for passing notional tests, neglecting their moral education (*pin de jiao yu* 品德教育).[23]

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence (*jia ting bao li* 家庭暴力) is another conspicuous family and social problem and a cause for divorce. The term "violence" (*bao li* 暴力) includes sexual abuse (*xing nue dai* 性虐待), physical violence (*shen ti bao li* 身體暴力) and abusive language (*yu yan bao li* 語言暴力).

On 17 June, 2015, I had a personal encounter with Therese Tang (*Tang Jing Lian* 湯靜蓮), a meek, frail and radiant religious sister[24] with the purpose of knowing her positive and fruitful contribution to the Taiwanese families. She is the Executive Directress of Good Shepherd Social Welfare Services Center (財團法人天主教善牧社會福利基金會).[25]

23. The situation of Taiwanese families (台灣家庭現況) at <http://www.mcef.url.tw/>.

24. Sister Tang belongs to the Good Shepherd Sisters Congregation (教善牧社會). The Sisters arrived to Taiwan in 1987 and started their pastoral service with young girls. Nowadays their pastoral activities include six categories: they offer services to women and children in crisis, unfortunate girls, children who witnessed violence, high-risk youth, dropouts, abandoned and abused children, single parents, foreign spouses and their families, aboriginal families, and victims of human-trafficking. They promote positive relationships between single parents and their children through activities that foster good parenting. For prevention, they hold related courses to prevent domestic violence.

25. See <http://www.catholic.org.tw/goodshepherd>.

Sister Tang was the first Catholic in Taiwan to start offering a "shelter" (*bi hu* 庇護) to young female victims of domestic violence or coming from "broken families" (*po sui jia ting* 破碎家庭). Eventually the shelter welcomed also their babies (*fu you* 婦幼) because she was convinced that "a mother cat has to bring her kittens, otherwise it cannot live".

At the beginning of the project, the shelter was kept in secret, because of the threat of their husbands. In the shelters the young mothers could find a gentle, peaceful and serene familiar environment receiving counseling and guidance from sisters, psychologists and lawyers. This pastoral approach was able to slowly assist these young girls to adjust to their current circumstances since, during the process of healing, they felt the constant urgency and "nostalgia" to go back to their families. The team was again challenged by the reality: how to prepare them to return to society with new personal resources, strength, dignity and determination.

Sister Tang (湯靜蓮) is familiar with the "peripheries" of Taiwanese families. She pointed out that the current condition of "foreign spouses" (*wai ji pei ou* 外籍配偶) is an important challenge. In providing shelter services for women and children who suffered domestic violence, she found that "foreign spouse" victims are increasing rapidly. The term "foreign spouse" refers mainly to women who immigrated to Taiwan through marriage. They usually lack resources and face an unfriendly environment without sufficient legal support. In addition, they can speak little Chinese and do not know how and where to ask for help. They feel humiliated and isolated; looked down upon by their mothers-in-law because of their poor communication and a cause of shame for their own children when interacting with other Taiwanese companions. Sister Tang presented a chart[26] with some figures: 18.26 percent of the foreign spouses[27] are coming from Vietnam; 5.65 percent from Indonesia; 1.68 percent from Thailand; 1.62 percent from the Philippines; 0.85 percent from Cambodia; 0.88 percent from Japan and 0.50 percent from Korea. 64 percent is coming from China mainland and 2.76 percent from Hong Kong and Macau.[28]

Sister Tang stressed that the challenges and tensions in their marriages are more acute. In Taichung, Yilan, and Kaohsiung, Good Shepherd Social Welfare Services Center pro-

26. Nationalities and number of *Foreign spouses*, April 2015.

27. The total amount of "foreign spouses" in Taiwan is 502,492: 162,806 (146,540 are women and 16,266 are men) are coming from Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Cambodia, Japan and Korea. 325,822 "foreign spouses" are coming from mainland China and 13,864 from Hong Kong and Macau. 14,835 are coming from other countries.

28. According to the Taiwan Ministry of the Interior, in 2007, there were 24,700 marriages between Taiwanese grooms and non-Taiwanese brides, representing 18,3 percent of all marriages and bringing the total number of foreign-born wives in Taiwan to 372,741. By the end of January 2010, the population of foreign-born wives had increased to 401,685, with the majority from China (65.5 percent), Vietnam (20.5 percent), and Indonesia (6.5 percent). By comparison, in 2007 there were just 31,807 marriages in Japan between foreign-born women and Japanese men, representing 4.4 percent of all marriages. At <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/tradition-and-progress-taiwans-evolving-migration-reality>.

vides services for foreign spouses and their families: family relationship maintenance, cultural adaptation, language learning, and parenthood education.

After Taiwan's domestic violence prevention law (家庭暴力防治法) was passed in June 1998, the number of domestic violence cases, however, remains high.[29]

The Ministry of the Interior statistics show that women accounted for about 60 percent of Taiwan's family violence victims, with those between 30–50 years old making up 40 percent of the total. Based on an analysis late last year of the cases handled by the Modern Women's Foundation (現代婦女基金會), around half of the abused married women dared to ask for help only after five years of suffering. Children and teenagers under 18 years are the second-largest group, making up about 22 percent.[30]

According to the professional experience of the psychologist Zheng (鄭玉英) and Sister Tang, there is a new and important element: the number of men calling or looking for counselling is increasing. The weakness, vulnerability, and the "unpreparedness" of males as an emerging factor, often perceived as a personal frustration and incapability to deal constructively with their counterpart, reflects also the progress in terms of education, the equality of the two genders (*liang xing ping quan* 兩性平權), employment position[31] and social and religious movements of protection for women.[32]

Nowadays, a young Taiwanese man facing a Taiwanese woman has to be aware that she is not similar to the ladies his grandfather or father encountered some decades ago. There is an urgent need to accompany the young Taiwanese men in this process of personal growth. This general "unpreparedness" of Taiwanese males, future husbands and fathers, requires rethinking a process of education on affectivity and sexuality to "prepare" them for the "difference" between man and woman which is not meant to stand in opposition, or subordination, but is for the sake of communion of life and procreation.

29. *The China Post*, 12 June, 2015; *Taipei Times*, 12 June, 2015. According to the latest statistics compiled by the Ministry of the Interior, the number of domestic violence cases reported to the police, hospital authorities and social welfare organizations in 2008 grew by about 10 percent from 2007 to a total of 79,874 cases, with 16 victims killed. Most family violence victims, regardless of their age or gender, are not willing to tell what happened to them. According to Ministry of Health and Welfare statistics, only one in every three child abuse cases, leading to severe injuries or deaths, in the past two years had been made known to authorities before the tragic accidents occurred. In 2014, there were 11,589 people who suffered domestic abuse, and 2,626 of them were six years old or younger. According to the Department of Protective services' (衛生福利部—保護服務司) Director Zhang Xiu Yuan (張秀鴛), young children and teenagers who lack the care of friends, family and neighbors are more likely to suffer from domestic abuse. Situations where child abuse is more likely to occur include when one caretaker has a history of violence, when parents are young or suffer from mental illness and when the children are disabled or premature. The "113 protection line" is a 24-hour public consultation and information child protection service hotline.

30. At <http://www.38.org.tw/OnePage_1_e.asp?id=72>.

31. It is interesting to notice the significant presence of female magistrates, judges and lawyers in Taiwanese judiciary system (司法官, 法庭). It reveals an extraordinary capacity of reflection, ponderation and judgement.

32. The difference between the conditions in the capital (Taipei) and countryside (*xiang xia* 鄉下), however, is still vast.

Single-Parent Families

In this regard, Sister Tang pointed out that in the past children of "single-parent families" (*dan qin jia ting* 單親家庭) were mainly coming from a divorce (*li hun* 離婚), or from an *intended wife/husband* relation (*wei hun*未婚) or from a widow/widower (*sang ou* 喪偶), but now the number of cases of children coming from unmarried mothers (*mei you jie hun* 沒有結婚) is increasing. Usually they are very young mothers (15 to 28 years old); many times they do not know how to take care of their children (lack of time, tiredness, bad temper…).

Many children spend most of their time at school: they eat there and some of them also sleep over there. There is the urgent need to accompany them while providing a personal, familiar and loving community net of relationships. Taiwanese society tolerates single-parents family (mainly women), but the families often do not feel recognized. These young mothers manifest that families need a more solid social structure and should defend the most disadvantaged: the kids.

According to the Report of the Single Parent Family Condition Survey 2010,[33] the number of single-parent families in Taiwan has increased from 370,000 to 560,000 in the past decade, in which the ratio of male to female parents is 4:6. Up to 75% of single-mother family monthly household income is less than 25,000 Taiwan Dollars. Sixty-seven percent of single-father families has the same income. Although the survey states that nearly 40% of single-parent families have received low-income subsidy or benefit, over 70% of the single parents declare that they have difficulty in making ends meet, indicating most single-parent families face economic hardship.

Furthermore, children born in single-parent families are predisposed to suffer from emotional problems. A cross-sectional study was performed to investigate the depression status of elementary school children in Miao Li County, Taiwan. A total of 881 eligible subjects, including 144 children from single-parent families were recruited from 29 schools. Data for depression-related demographic characteristics, family and school variables were collected. The results show that 27.6% of children from single-father families have depressive symptoms, 15.1% children from single-mother families and 15.3% children from both-parent families have depressive symptoms.[34]

According to the Child Welfare League Foundation, Taiwan (兒童福利聯盟文教基金會台北總會), a recent survey on the social habits of Taiwanese elementary and junior-high students showed that 60.3 percent of preteens have trouble making friends and do not know how to get along with others. The survey on schoolchildren in grades five to eight found that of this 60.3 percent, 40.2 percent do not know what to do after getting

33. Women and Men in ROC (Taiwan) Facts and Figures, at <http://ebook.dgbas.gov.tw/public/Data/47314380IGBKGOIN.pdf>.

34. Modification Effects of Family Economic Status and School Factors on Depression Risk of Single-father Family Children in Mid-Taiwan Area, School of Public Health, National Defense Medical Center, Taipei, Taiwan, ROC, at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23466475>.

into arguments with friends, while 30.5 percent reported that they do not know how to express their feelings. The most pitiful are the 15.7 percent of pre-teens who said they do not even know how to make friends. While they experienced difficulty in real life, many of the respondents said they tend to see people on the Internet as their friends. Nearly all of the preteens surveyed—96 percent—make friends in school and in after-school classes, but 45.1 percent said they feel that chatting over the Internet is easier than talking face-to-face.[35]

Also the dietary habits are related to familial relations. The Child Welfare League Foundation of Taiwan affirms that more than 70 percent of elementary school students in Taiwan do not have a balanced diet. The survey of children's dietary habits showed that 22.8 percent of elementary school students have dinner with their parents fewer than 3 times a week, while 8.6 percent never eat dinner with their parents. According to the Foundation, 35.6 percent of elementary school students eat out more than three days a week, 8.6 percent do so every day, while 29.5 percent eat at home every day.[36]

Another challenge pointed out by Sister Tang refers to the program of sexual education taught at schools. Sexual education is entirely centered on how to reduce the levels of pregnancy in adolescents; prevention of HIV/AIDS and contraception (*bao xian tao* 保險套). A comprehensive and proactive (psychological, moral, value-based…) sexual education course is lacking. In fact, if an adolescent becomes pregnant, often the first experience of the young mother is that of abandonment and isolation, without really knowing what to do.

Economic Difficulties

On 16 June, 2015, Prof. Qi Ming (齊明)[37] of the Life Ethics Research Centre, Protection of Family Group (生命倫理研究中心輔仁聖博敏神學院) kindly accepted a request to answer some questions regarding changes in the Taiwanese families.

He opened the conversation saying that Taiwan's younger generations (under 30s), mainly with a westernized vision (towards United States, Australia, United Kingdom, and Germany), show a lack of hope for the future and much skepticism. There is a palpable difficulty for the younger generation to envision their future. The governmental policy regarding families is centered on what is economically profitable. It is much more concerned about the material aspects of the family's life, and less considerate of the necessary conditions in order for a family to exist. Moreover, the stagnating salaries and the soaring housing prices contribute to encouraging young people to postpone marriage and procreation. The basic wage in Taiwan put into practice on 1 July, 2014 is 19,273 Taiwan Dollars (about US Dollars 620) per month or 115 Taiwan Dollars per hour (about US Dollars 3.83).

35. *Taipei Times*, 23 July, 2014.
36. *The China Post*, 18 March, 2015.
37. Prof. Qi Ming is a father of three children with a happy journey as husband and parent.

Former US Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke at an economic forum held in Taipei in May 2015, surprised by the fact that the current basic salary had slipped to what it was 15 years ago, said that low wage growth cannot be blamed entirely on inflation. It is also closely related to the entire economic system, development of technology and also income distribution.[38] According to transaction figures released by the Ministry of the Interior, average apartment prices are 15 times higher than average incomes, higher than in Hong Kong and Singapore. With such a high price-earnings ratio, most people cannot afford to buy a home. Taipei has an average home price of 686,000 Taiwan Dollars (US Dollars 22,650) per "*ping*".[39] Housing prices in Taipei have risen by 91.6% between in 2008 and 2014, according to Bank of America.[40]

In Taiwan there are numerous families with serious economic difficulties. According to the report of a survey conducted by the Child Welfare League Foundation in 2014, more than 5,000 children from disadvantaged families were benefited from the program of the Foundation. 44.5 percent of disadvantaged families are represented by single-parents families. The average of five members per family, only 1.3 percent is doing hard work. 52.8 percent of them, each month receives a basic salary of 19,047 Taiwan Dollars (about 613 US Dollars). 92.5 percent of these families had the experience of borrowing money to live. 75 percent of them rely on the help of borrowed money to feed their children. The survey shows that 83.8 percent of single-parents families feel guilty because they cannot offer a better condition for their children.[41]

The Taiwan Fund for Children and Families (家扶基金會) published research on disadvantaged children in Taiwan revealing that 10 percent of 4,000 children surveyed have seen illegal drugs, over 40 percent of them cannot afford breakfast every day and 61 percent don't have someone at home to help them with their homework. The Fund for Children and Families said the rate is higher than the level found in research conducted in 2009. Around 10 percent of children living in poverty have seen illegal drugs in either night clubs, internet cafes, at home or in the homes of relatives or friends. If they have seen illegal drugs, some of them may have actually done drugs.

As previously stated, over 40 percent of these children regularly do not have breakfast, 67.9 percent of them cannot afford lunch and 61 percent of them have experienced eating nothing for a whole day in order to save money for their families. Children's academics are also affected by economic difficulties. 61 percent of children cannot find people to help them when they face difficulties with their schoolwork. Most of the families cannot afford to send their children to tutorial classes. More than 70 percent of the parents do

38. *The China Post*, 28 May, 2015.

39. *Ping* (坪) is a customary and traditional unit of measurement in Taiwan which is equivalent to 3,306 square meters. In Taoyuan and Taichung residential property average prices are around 200,000 Taiwan Dollars (US Dollars 6,666) per *ping*.

40. At <http://www.globalpropertyguide.com/Asia/Taiwan/Price-History>.

41. At < http://www.children.org.tw>.

not have time to help their children with their homework because they are busy working to make a living.[42]

Urbanization

Migration is a global phenomenon.[43] People are moving everywhere. They go for many reasons, but most because of economics. Taiwan is no exception. Taiwan with 23.46 million people occupies a small island of 36.000 km² (population density is around 640/Km²). The rate and pattern of Taiwan's urbanization (*du shi hua* 都市化) has been influenced mainly by national and international economic trends. The level of urbanization increased with industrial development. The majority of the population is moving to urbanized areas in order to find more opportunities.[44]

In this relentless process, Aborigines, who traditionally live in the mountains, feel pushed out of their homes and pulled to the big cities searching for jobs. In this regard Sister Tang pointed out another crucial element. The Aborigines (mainly Christians and Catholics) coming to the cities with an open and collaborative attitude, a connatural sense of community life and a set of moral values, face the challenges of urbanization: isolation, anonymity, self-centered relations, solitude, opportunities of pleasure and comfort accompanied by painful experiences of being cheated or abused. The lack of a plan to accompany and introduce them into the urban society can become a providential opportunity to rethink how Taiwan should respond to urbanization.[45]

Internet Addiction Disorder. An Emerging Pediatric Disease

Pediatricians and psychiatrists have categorized Internet and electronic device addiction *(wang lu cheng yin zheng* 網絡成癮症*)* as an "emerging pediatric disease". Taiwan Internet Addiction Prevention Association (中亞聯大網路成癮防治中心)[46] director general Zhang Li Ren (張立人), a psychiatrist, said children exposed to electronic devices at an early age

42. *Taipei Times*, 22 August, 2014.

43. S. Ticozzi, "Urbanization: Challenges for the Church in China," *Tripod*, 2013, 28/171: 5. Mainland China is in the midst of an incredibly rapid process of urbanization. Though it is hard to gather objective data in a country as vast as China, according to the official estimate, by the end of 2012, mainland China had an urban population of 712 million person or 52.6 percent of the total population; thus overtaking its rural counterpart. According to predictions, nearly 70 percent of the population will live in urban areas by 2035.

44. By the end of 2013, the population in the capital Taipei or Taipei City (*Tai Bei Shi* 臺北市) reached 2,686,516; New Taipei City (*Xin Bei Shi* 新北市) 3,966,818; Taoyuan City (*Tao Yuan Shi* 桃園市) 2,058,328; Taizhong City (*Tai Zhong Shi* 臺中市) 2,719,835; Kaohsiung City (*Gao Xiong Shi* 高雄) 2,778,992; etc.

45. Sister Tang stressed the urgency to create and multiply "spaces" to meet people and get information easily, to keep them united but also integrated within a larger civil community. Collaboration and teamwork with other institutions, transversal and itinerant "presence" of pastoral agents, personal outreach, small, welcoming and supportive groups and families and cultural communication (Facebook, e-mail, posters, fliers, suitable literature…) are all necessary to create relationships.

46. Asia University (AU) and China Medical University (CMU), united recently as China Asia Associated University (CA2), established jointly the first Prevention Center for Internet Addiction in Taiwan, (網路成癮防治中心) providing consultation and outpatient services for heavy internet users or addicts.

are more prone to anxiety and depression as the strong audio and video stimulation provided by the devices could affect their developing neural circuitry. Once children become addicted to the Internet electronic gadgets, they could experience headaches, insomnia, blurry vision, or become suspicious and hostile.

In Taiwan, there is a growing concern regarding Internet addiction among children and teenagers. Evolution of Taiwan Pediatrics Associations (台灣兒科醫學會) director-general Huang Jing Long (黃璟隆) said that according to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Education among 8,910 students last year, about 19 percent of junior-high school students, 15.9 percent of senior-high school students and 12.1 percent of elementary-school pupils are addicted to online games, that is 10 to 15% of teens and college students in Taiwan have been classified as having internet addiction.[47]

Suicides (*zi sha* 自殺) are in part related to this disease. The Taiwanese Society of Suicidology (社團法人台灣自殺防治學會) and the Taiwan Suicide Prevention Center (台灣自殺防治中心) cautioned the public over a correlation between Internet addiction and an increased tendency toward depression and suicide as part of their efforts to reduce the nation's suicide rate.[48] While the suicide rate in Taiwan has shown a decline over the past years, from its peak of 19.3 per 100,000 people in 2006 to 15.3 in 2013, the survey con-

47. *Taipei Times,* 3 April, 2015.

48. The Director of the Center for Suicide Research and Prevention at the University of Hong Kong, Prof. Paul Yip (葉兆輝) wrote that suicide is a major public health issue across the world. It is the cause of 800,000 premature deaths globally. In the 1990s, China had one of the highest suicide rates (23,2 per 100.000 people). An estimated 250,000 suicides were reported every year in the 1990s, accounting for about a quarter of all suicides in the world. In fact, suicide was the fifth leading cause of deaths in China. Prof. Paul Yip also pointed out that more women than men committed suicide in China during that period, which was drastically different from the about 3:1 male-female suicide ratio in Western countries. Also, the suicide rate in China was substantially higher in rural areas than in cities, with older adults more prone to committing suicide. The good news is that the overall suicide rate in China has declined significantly because of the country's fast-paced economic development. The estimated mean national suicide rate is now 9.8 per 100,000, nearly 60 percent lower than in the 1990s. Urbanization and economic growth in the past decade have created more education and employment opportunities for everyone, especially women in rural areas, and reduced gender inequality. Control on the sale of pesticides which many rural people used to drink to commit suicide, and the improvement in healthcare service have also contributed to the decline in the suicide rate. China's experience seems to be at odds with the situation of other countries such as South Korea and Japan where industrialization, urbanization and modernization lead to higher level of social anomie and lower level of social integration as a result of popularized individualism and egoism, and subsequently increases in the suicide rate. In China, however, for the time being, these factors can work as protective shields against suicides. But simply improving the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) may not be enough to guarantee the well-being of the people and a continuous drop in the suicide rate. There are still many areas and regions in China which have yet to taste the fruits of the country's economic development and the people living there are more prone to committing suicide. The resilience level of the youth and the growing disparity between the rich and the poor are still a cause for worry. The uncertainty of economic growth has also caused considerable anxiety among Chinese people. The rapid socio-economic development in any country has its costs. For example, South Korea and Japan have high GDP but their suicide rates are amongst the highest in OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries. The rapid socio-economic change could be a source of more stress for the Chinese people and a new cause of suicides in China. Research conducted by the University of Hong Kong's Center for Suicide Research and Prevention (香港大學賽馬會防止自殺研究中心) shows that the

ducted among 2,147 people aged 15 or older from 1 July to 12 July, 2014, about 6.6 percent of the respondents said they had experienced negative moods in the past week and 2.4 percent said they had had suicidal thoughts in the same period.

Based on these figures, nationwide there are approximately 1,33 million people troubled by depression and 482,000 by suicidal thoughts. A further breakdown of the results showed that about 35.5 percent of the respondents who indicated negative moods or suicidal thoughts said that they have seriously considered suicide, while 11.9 percent have attempted it. Among the respondents who meet criteria for Internet gaming disorder stipulated in the fifth edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder*—a diagnostic guide for mental-health professionals—24 percent said they are affected by negative emotions and 11.5 percent said they have considered suicide.[49]

Television also plays a major role as a source of information for half of the preteens surveyed, leaving them more open to "romantic" relationships. With the popularity of television "dramas" or "soap operas" (*dian shi ju* 電視劇), 26 percent of those polled said they get their information on male and female relationships from Taiwanese "idol dramas" (*ou xiang ju* 偶像劇), while another 20 percent get their information from Japanese and South Korean dramas.[50]

Time Consuming Work

Professor Wang Yun Dong (王雲東) from the Department of Social Work at the National Taiwan University wrote that the problem of overwork in Taiwan is getting increasingly more serious, and the age pattern of those over-worked is becoming "M-shaped"[51] with even workers under the age of 30 having died from overwork. Ministry of Labor statistics show that workers complete an average of 2,214 hours per year, which is much higher than nations like the United States, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Japan. For example, average annual work hours for those in Taiwan are 736 hours higher than in Germany.

Death from overwork (*guo lao si* 過勞死) refers mainly to sudden death caused by an excessive workload. In such cases, the actual cause of death generally takes the form of acute circulatory illnesses, which fall into two main categories—cerebrovascular diseases and acute cardiac disease attacks. The definition of "overwork" involves an overall assess-

increasing suicide rates in some East/Southeast Asian Countries could be attributed to the 1997–98 Asian financial crisis. Similarly, an increase in suicides in European countries and the United States can be blamed on the 2008-09 global financial crisis. Therefore, the declining rate of suicide in China could be reversed in the next decade because of social stress associated with the slowdown in economic growth, rapid aging of the population, increased economic burden, income inequality and social instability. The risks associated with urbanization will start emerging by the next decade and could lead to a weakening of ties with family, friends, institutions and hometowns. At <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn>.

49. *Taipei Times,* 14 September, 2014.

50. *Taipei Times,* 23 July, 1014.

51. "M-Shaped" refers to a new economic structure with polarized wealth distribution. The middle class is assimilated to be the lower or upper class.

ment of long-term excessive work. For example, an employee working 92 overtime hours within one month, or an average of 72 hours per month for two to six months before falling ill; or short-term overwork, such as having worked extraordinarily long hours or being on duty, or working night shifts for a day or week before falling ill. The basic idea of overwork is fatigue (*pi lao* 疲勞) and pressure (*ya li* 壓力).[52] For example, some senior department chiefs, while not necessarily working particularly long hours, might nonetheless face excessive stress that could lead to death through overwork.[53]

Taiwanese fathers can afford only slightly more than one hour per day average with their children. The survey, conducted by the Yes123 job website (*Yes123 qiu zhi wang* 求職網) found that 60.1 percent of fathers often have to work overtime, with their work hours averaging 10.1 per day. The time fathers spend with children is markedly less than that of working mothers, who have an average 108 minutes per day with their children.[54]

From an educative point of view, parents experience a gap between family and school. They feel incompetent to collaborate and intervene in some educative models taught in schools.

Birth Rate

In his inaugural address as the President of Taiwan,[55] Mister Ma Ying Jiu (馬英九) said that the current birth rate (*chu sheng lu* 出生率) is an issue that threatens Taiwan's very existence: "Taiwan's birth rate has been declining, and its population has been aging for a long time. These trends are national security issues that must be faced".[56]

The island's plummeting birth rate is one of the lowest in the world. According to the Ministry of the Interior, the number of births registered in Taiwan dropped to 199,113 in 2013,[57] a decrease of 13.23 percent from a year earlier, a fall mainly attributable to an elevated birth rate in 2012, the Year of the Dragon.[58] The crude birth rate in 2013 was 8.35 per 1,000, down 1.73 from the previous year.

52. Taiwanese consumed a total of 327 million sleeping pills last year, according to the Food and Drug Administration in Taiwan (食品藥物管理局). Some local doctors point out, however, that many who suffer from insomnia in fact do not need to take sleeping pills. According to Food and Drug Administration in Taiwan statistics, over each of the past four years, locals spent more than 300 million (Taiwan Dollars) on sleeping pills annually. The top three prescribed sleeping pills in Taiwan last year were *Zolpidem, Estazolam* and *Bromazepam*.

53. *Taipei Times*, 29 March, 2015.

54. *The China Post*, 8 August, 2014.

55. Second term as President of Taiwan: 20 May, 2012.

56. *The China Post*, 21 May, 2012.

57. The birthrate fell from 300,000 births in 2000 to 167,000 in 2010. Although the number increased to 210,000 in 2014, it was the result of a high marriage rate that year and did not represent a reversal of the downward trend. Taiwan used to record 400,000 births per year in the 1960s and 1970s.

58. The number of babies born reached a high of 229,481 in 2012, mainly due to people's preferences for having children in the Year of the Dragon (*long* 龍), as the dragon is considered the luckiest of the Chinese zodiac signs. The Year of the Dragon started Jan. 23, 2012 and lasted until Feb. 9, 2013. It was followed by the less popular Year of the Snake (*shi* 蛇), which lasts until 30 January, 2014.

The Ministry of the Interior said 6.7 percent of babies were born to foreign mothers in 2013, almost all of whom came from mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau and Southeast Asia.[59]

A total of 53.5 percent of the babies were born to first-time mothers, 36.1 percent were second births and 10.4 percent were third or more births. Compared with a decade ago, the share of first-time births was up by 2.2 percentage points, but for second and third or more births the shares fell by 0.5 and 1.7 percentage points, respectively. Most births were to mothers aged 25–34 years old, with the average age of mothers giving birth continuing to increase to 31.4. Mothers from Southeast Asia had the youngest average age, at 29.9, while those from mainland China and its two special administrative regions (Hong Kong and Macau) averaged 30.5. The age of foreign mothers giving birth has rapidly increased, and was on average 5.8 years and 2.8 years older for those from Southeast Asia and mainland China (including Hong Kong and Macau), respectively.

In light of the nation's current low reproductive rate, the Center of Reproductive Medicine at the hospital of Da Qian Health Medical System in Miaoli (苗栗大千醫院生殖醫學中心) has promoted a gift box to encourage couples to get pregnant. The gift box consists of a pair of chopsticks (*kuai zi* 筷子) and a miniature shovel (*chan zi* 鏟子) which in Chinese is homophonic to the phrase "deliver a son soon" (*kuai yi dian chan sheng hai zi* 快一點產生孩子).[60]

On the other hand, between 300,000 and 500,000 abortions are carried out in Taiwan each year, National Taiwan University College of Medicine (國立臺灣大學醫學院) profes-

59. Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, which has the lowest birthrate, has gone furthest. There are free tests to identify fertility problems, parental advisers, a "baby bonus" (*ying hai jiang jin* 嬰孩獎金) of 20,000 Taiwanese Dollars; and a childcare allowance for under-fives worth up to 150,000 Dollars a child. To encourage marriage, the city organizes matchmaking day trips for singles and free courses on handling relationships. It even subsidizes companies to organize dating activities for employees. But in Japan it took 40 years for the proportion of over-65s to rise from 7% to 20%. A shift away from traditional rural lifestyles has allowed women easier access to university education and the time-consuming jobs that follow. Many Taiwanese women delay getting married to pursue academic degrees or careers. Career advancement has overtaken other goals.

60. In mainland China, parents are being offered cash rewards to give their newborn children the mother's last name, in an unusual attempt to address the traditional preference for sons. Women who marry in China keep their own surnames, but their children almost invariably take the father's name and ensure its continuation into the next generation. Now officials in Chang Feng county in the eastern province of An Hui are giving 1,000 yuan (US Dollars 162) to couples who take part in the "surname reform" plan. They hope the move will help to gradually change the common perception that giving birth to a son is preferable. China suffers from a huge gender imbalance as a result of sex-selective abortions and the strict family-planning law known as the one-child-policy. Female infanticide and the abandoning of baby girls have also been reported. In most countries, males slightly outnumber females, with between 103 and 107 boys for every 100 girls, but China has nearly 118 male births for every 100 females in 2012. In Chang Feng county, that ratio has reached nearly 130 boys for every 100 girls. China's has tens of millions more men than women, one of the worst distortions in the world. Many of those men are now unable to find Chinese brides—a phenomenon that has become a key driver of trafficking of women from the Southeast Asia to China. Daughters have often been regarded as a liability because parents have to provide a dowry on marriage. They will also go to live with their husband's family, so sons are seen as a guarantee of care in old age. Men generally earn more than women in China, and in rural areas, boys are preferred for their ability to work the land. *The China Post*, 2 August, 2014.

sor and pediatrician Lue Hung Chi (呂鴻基) said publicly. Lue Hung Chi indicated that the birthrate last year was 166,000, showing that the number of abortions far exceeded the number of children born.[61] On the same issue, The Bureau of Health Promotion (衛生福利部國民健康署) estimates, instead, that at least 240,000 abortions are carried out in Taiwan each year, based on figures for induced abortion under the National Health Insurance Program (衛生福利部中央健康保險署) and the use of the abortion-inducing drug RU-486.[62]

An Aging Society

Taiwan's population is set to peak within the next 12 years and then decline dramatically, with consequences for society that badly need to be addressed, a national population estimate for 2014–2061. In its report, the National Development Council (國家發展委員會) said the fastest-growing period for senior citizens would be from now until 2025, as baby boomers reach retirement age. The population trend is worrying, said the council deputy Huang Wan Xiang (黃萬翔).[63]

The nation's population totaled 23.46 million as of the end of last month (May 2015), according to the latest statistics released by the Ministry of Interior. The figure represents an increase of 69,662 people, or 0.3 percent, from a year earlier, an average increase of 191 people per day. Compared with 2014, the number of men rose by 18,798, or 0,16 percent, to 11,7 million, while women jumped by 50,864 or 0,43 percent, to 11,75 million. The population of women surpassed that of men for the first time in November 2013, and the trend has continued since then.

Among the reasons for the greater number of women are the immigration of female foreign spouses, improvements in the average of lifespan of women and the ban on fetal gender screening. Compared with last year, Kinmen County, recorded the highest population growth of any administrative district in Taiwan at 5 percent. The population of Chiayi County saw the largest drop, decreasing by 0.97 percent. In Taiwan, about 14% of citizens are over 65. Within two decades, that will double. According to current trends, Taiwan will soon become the oldest country in the world, warned Dr. Yang Wen Shan (楊文山) a demographer at the Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica (中央研究院社會學) in Taipei: "Right now, seven working people are supporting one older person. By 2045, 1.45 people will be supporting one".[64]

Taiwan's working age population (age 15 to 64) is to reach its peak of 17.37 million next year and then steadily decline. Taiwan has become an aging society and will become an aged society (14 percent) in 2018 followed by becoming a super-aged society (20 percent)

61. *Taipei Times*, 19 July, 2011.
62. *Taipei Times*, 03 August, 2011.
63. *Taipei Times*, 20 August, 2014.
64. H. W. Richardson and Chang Woon Nam (ed.), *Shrinking Cities. A Global Perspective, Regional Studies Association*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 201.

in 2025. Senior citizens would account for 43.2 percent of Taiwanese society in 2061. Taiwan's dependency ratio—the ratio of those under the age of 15 and over the age of 64 compared with those of working age—is to rise to an ominous 0.99:1 in 2016, from 0.35:1 this year.[65]

The Promotion of Diverse Family Formation

The plan to amend article 972 of the Taiwan Civil Code,[66] that is, to allow same-sex marriage (*tong xing hun yin* 同性婚姻), has already passed the first reading in the Legislative Yuan (*li fa yuan* 立法院, The Taiwanese Parliament).[67]

Although the Christian presence in Taiwan is small,[68] on 30 November, 2013, an important gathering in favor of the constitutional family was organized with other members of the Alliance of Religions for the Protection of Family (台灣守護家庭宗教大聯盟).[69]

Believers, Christians and Catholics are called to be aware of these "petitions" of redefining the constitutional family. With a focus on serenity, respect for the right of each individual, and avoidance of putting themselves as judges of others, they are called to clarify their stance on the basis of a distinct and transparent language required for a dialogue—without feeling "guilty" of any "phobia"—only because they believe and sustain that a dynamic and harmonious duality and complementarity between a man and a woman belongs to the anthropology of humanity. Each person is called to recognize that he/she possesses only one of the two basic variants of mankind and that the other will be forever inaccessible. Complementarity takes many forms, as each man and woman brings his or her distinctive contributions to their marriage, to the formation of their children, to the society—his or her personal richness, personal charisma.

The different ways to safeguard family as the backbone of humanity should not become occasions of unjustified divisions or unjustified and harmful reciprocal exclusions.

These petitions constitute a challenge that asks for a positive and courageous daily witness: family is the ecosystem of a person and many values are learnt by osmosis:

> Experience teaches us: in order to know oneself well and develop harmoniously, a human being needs the reciprocity of man and woman. When that is lacking,

65. *Taipei Times*, 20 August, 2014.

66. "An agreement to marry shall be made by the male and the female parties in their own concord". At <http://www.international-divorce.com/taiwan_marriage_contract.htm>.

67. The Taipei City Government on 17 June, 2015, became the second city in the nation to accept household registrations of same-sex partnerships (*tong xing ban lu hu deng ji* 同性伴侶戶政登記). Taipes's move comes nearly one month after the Kaohsiung City Government began recognizing household registrations of same-sex partnerships. *Taipei Times*, 20 June, 2015.

68. Government statistics show that Buddhism is the most popular religion, practiced by around 35.1% of Taiwanese, followed closely by Taoism (33,0%). Christianity and *Yi Guan Dao* (一貫道) are the third and fourth most popular religions, followed by 3,9% and 3,5% respectively. Approximately 18.7% of Taiwanese are non-religious. The Catholic Church represents 1 percent. From the Ministry of Interior. At <http://www.moi.gov.tw/stat/english/introduction.asp>.

69. Buddhist, Daoist, Confucians, *Yi Guan Dao*, *Tong Yi Jiao* (一貫道, 統一教宗), Protestants and Catholics.

> one can see the consequences. We are made to listen to one another and help one another. We can say that without the mutual enrichment of this relationship—in thought and in action, in affection and in work, as well as in faith—the two cannot even understand the depth of what it means to be man and woman… I ask myself, if the so-called gender theory is not, at the same time, an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it. Yes, we risk taking a step backwards. The removal of difference in fact creates a problem, not a solution.[70]

THE LOCAL CHURCH

The Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference

Catholics in Taiwan comprise one percent of the total population. No less than 75% of Catholics marry non-Catholics resulting in an inter-faith marriage. 60% of single Catholics, hoping to find a marriage partner, believe that finding a Catholic partner is "very important"[71] and 57% consider the possibility of Catholic communities as the place where to get to know the partner. Community life can play a fundamental and positive role.

The Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference (*tian zhu jiao hui tai wan di qu zhu jiao tuan* 天主教會台灣地區主教團)[72] through the Commission for Evangelization, Section for Family, has been helping parishes to be very supportive of families. Moreover, teams and ecclesial movements are creatively and constructively involved in accompanying nuclear families through workshops, retreats, holiday camps and marriage encounter weekends. In their pastoral approach, they accompany those who are in the first years of marriage, and they foster the development of relationships within the family dimensions.[73]

Furthermore, the Catholic Archdiocese of Taipei Pastoral & Evangelization Section Family (天主教台北總主教區牧靈福傳處家庭組)[74] is carrying out an effective and rewarding formation program (*hun qian ken tan* 婚前懇談) for couples preparing to wed. Prof. Liang Qian Yi (梁倩怡)[75] stresses the significance of a personalized support for couples

70. Pope Francis, *The Role of Parents in Educating Children*, April 15, 2015, General Audience, at <https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150415_udienza-generale.html>.

71. Of seven possible criteria for choosing a marriage partner (compatibility, same value system, appearance, same religion, employment, finances, and level of education), women listed being a Catholic in third place and men listed it in fourth place. Both men and women have "compatibility" and the "same value system" in first and second place. Cf. A. Doyle, "Catholic Marriage in Taiwan," *Tripod*, 2014, 34/173: 47.

72. <At http://www.catholic.org.tw/en/>.

73. Marriage Encounter (*hun yin guan xi ken tan hui* 婚姻關係懇談會); Focolare Movement (*shi jie bo ai yun dong* 世界傳愛運動); Neocatechumenal Way or Neocatechumenate (*xin mu dao tuan* 新慕道團); Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement (*tian zhu jiao shen en fu xing yun dong* 天主教神恩復興運動); Rerum Novarum Center for Migrants (*xin shi she hui fu wu zhong xin* 新事社會服務中心); and Taipei Friendship House.

74. At <http://www.catholic.org.tw/taipei/peo/home/>.

75. At <http://sweetclc.pixnet.net/blog>.

who are preparing for marriage. Non-Christians are also taking part in this journey of life. Motivations, personal and mutual knowledge, and moral values are at the core of the counseling (*fu dao* 輔導).

Currently, there are 48 Catholic schools with about four thousand teachers and educators in Taiwan. In the annual meeting of Catholic teachers in Taiwan (April 2015), educators and teacher reflected on "The Gospel of the family in the digital era". The teachers are committed to strengthening the communication between families, schools and education to values.

In this regard, it is also worth mentioning how some Protestant Congregations are offering elaborate, popular and successful programs on "marriage introduction," relationship counseling, workshops on "finding true parents," and the importance of value-based education in schools.[76] The Taiwan True Jesus Church (真耶穌教會台灣總會) has a Christian Marriage Bureau on the General Assembly[77] level, a Marriage Introduction Service Center on the district level, and 400 parishioners serving their 170 parishes as matchmakers. This structure has been part of official church procedures since 1937. The Leadership board of the Presbyterian Church (*tai wan ji du zhang lao jiao hui* 台灣基督長老教會)[78] sponsors weekend gatherings four times a year. In March 2014, a website for all Protestants in Taiwan was opened for marriage introduction.[79]

SOME CONCLUSIONS

The Resources and Instruments

The personal and professional experience of the family psychotherapist Prof. Zheng Yu Ying, the Directress of Good Shepherd Social Welfare Services Center, Sister Tang and Prof. Qi Ming of the Life Ethics Research Centre, Protection of Family Group offered a credible testimony that despite real fragilities, psychological and ethical distress, Taiwanese families have many resources, and remain the basis of great love. It is thought-provoking to observe how Chinese families, every year, long for the celebration of the Chinese lunar new year (*chun jie* 春節), a priceless and sacred time for family reunion.

A perfect family, without uncertainties, tears, or doubts does not exist. Also households engaged in Christian communities no longer hide the difficulties to combine truth and mercy, even among themselves. To accept fragilities means that all those involved must first of all admit their own. And the conjugal relationship is the first to be tested by the culture of relativism that permeates the whole society.

76. The Unification Church Movement (*tong yi jiao hui* 統一教會) has a program called Pure Love Alliance (*qing shao nian chun jie xie hui* 青少年純潔協會) which promotes pure love concepts (advocating purity) in schools and provides tutoring to young children in vulnerable social groups. At <https://www.purelove.org.tw/>.

77. At <http://www.tjc.org.tw/>.

78. At <http://www.pct.org.tw/>.

79. Cf. A. Doyle, "Catholic Marriage in Taiwan," op. cit., 48.

Many Taiwanese families give testimony every day and often noiselessly, that when a family "works," that is, every member contributes to the good and growth of the other members, then family can offer everyone a place to be loved and recognized, a place for everybody, gratuitously and without distinctions, regardless of economic or social criteria. Family can offer a place where to cure her/his own wounds and be reborn. Family remains the first place for solidarity. Family teaches to pay attention to the other and share his/her joys and sorrows. Family is again the place of reconciliation and forgiveness. This condition of life helps the children to become adults and have the energy to endure and face the innumerable challenges of life.

Time

Pressure, especially the pressure of time, is a reality that everybody experiences. Taiwanese families are overwhelmed by the pressure of time and time is one of the principal subjects of negotiation within the members of a family.

It is hard to balance familial life and professional life (work, studies, and leisure). Many people would like to have more time to spend together; however, society does not send any signal to recognize that the time dedicated to family (although it is not economically profitable) is highly "profitable". Society does not know how to value this "investment". To spend time to sit and eat together while talking with each other is an effective way to defend from the frenetic acceleration of the social life. Family has to be an "oasis of deceleration" in terms of memory, affections, emotions, imagination, dialogue, listening and gratuitousness.

Christian people believe that the gift of faith offers another perception of time, the time of God. In front of eternity, time is brought to its real value and becomes an ally that helps to strengthen and deepen conjugal and familial love:

> Life has become stingy with the time for talking, reflecting and facing oneself. Many parents are "sequestered" by work—mom and dad have to work—and by worries, uncomfortable with the new needs of their children and with the complexity of modern life—which is the way it is and we must accept it as it is—and they find themselves as if paralyzed by the fear of making a mistake. The problem, however, is not just talking. Superficial "dialogue" does not lead to a true meeting of mind and heart. Let us ask instead: do we seek to understand "where" our children really are in their journey? Where is their soul, do we really know? And above all: do we want to know? Are we convinced that they, in reality, aren't waiting for something else?[80]

80. Pope Francis, The Role of Parents in Educating Children, 2015, May 20, at <https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150520_udienza-generale.html>.

A Pastoral Approach to Separated Couples

The fruitful journey of the Catholic Church in Hong Kong[81] to promote the collaboration of separated parents in continuing to parenting the children deserves a special mention. The name of this pastoral action is "co-parenting service" (*he zuo fu mu* 合作父母), a cooperating project for separated and divorce parents. The experience of separation or divorce is certainly a traumatic event not only for couples, but also for the children involved. Children are the most vulnerable and defenseless in this process and easily become the victims of this painful situation.

The communities provide counseling services to separated or divorced parents to deal with new responsibilities and a co-parenting plan as well as ensuring that their children maintain a close and loving relationship with both parents. The co-parenting service also offers counseling and/or support for parents to deal with their own emotional wounds. The counseling service also provides assistance to children to manage the negative impact, to help them to express their worries and stresses facing the family changes:

> It is even more difficult for parents who are separated, who are weighed down by their condition: the poor dears, they have had real hardships, they have separated and frequently the child is taken hostage and the father speaks ill of the mother, and the mother speaks ill of the father, and so much harm is done. But I say to separated parents: never, never, never take your child hostage! You separated because of many difficulties and reasons, life has given you this trial, but the children should not be the ones to carry the weight of this separation, they should not be used as hostages against the other spouse, they should grow up hearing their mother speak well of their father, even though they are not together, and the father speak well of their mother. For separated parents this is very important and very difficult, but they can do it.[82]

The New Generations of Taiwanese Men

The new generations of young men, the future husbands and fathers, are called to rediscover through a personalized and community counselling (*pei yu* 培育, *fu dao* 輔導) the vocation and mission to be the "head" (*tou* 頭).

It is interesting to notice how in the civil and religious communities the presence of women is active, full of interest, enthusiasm and creativity, with a great sense of participation, and a leading and constructive role. The presence of men is lagging behind the pace of women and more often lonely (*ji mo* 寂寞), adopting a remissive, compliant and courteous (*ke qi* 客氣) presence. It is important that in the Taiwanese society men regain the "respect" of others.

81. The Hong Kong Catholic Marriage Advisory Council. At <http://www.cmac.org.hk/en/services_detail.php?c1id=8&c2id=6>.

82. Ivi.

In the Bible, Saint Paul uses the term *kephalē* (ἡ κεφαλὴ) to express this vision. *Kephalē* / ἡ κεφαλὴ (*tou* 頭), in some contexts, means "source" or "font" (*1Co* 11:3) and in others, "head"—"authority" (*Ep* 5:23). Saint Paul exhorts man to be "the head (*tou* 頭) of his wife" (*Ep* 5:23). The Apostle knows very well from Genesis 1:26–27 that man and woman together represent the image of God. Both of them truly depend on each other (*1Co* 11:11–12). Saint Paul, in the letter to the Ephesians (5:21), opens his exhortation on Christian marriage saying: "Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ" (*Ep* 5:21 *NAB*).[83]

The verb "to be submitted"/"to be subject"[84] in the Christian context, or more precisely Christological perspective, is employed to describe the relationship of Jesus, the Son, with God (*1Co* 15:28)[85] and the recognition of the authoritative role of service carried out for the good of the community (*1Co* 16:16). In this case, "to be submitted" corresponds to an attitude of reciprocal service or dedication where every Christian is called to "serve one another in love" (*Gal* 5:13). For the husband to be the "head" (*tou* 頭) of the wife must be understood only in this "new" perspective. In fact, the exhortation "to be submitted" refers to the Christian experience of faith: "in the fear[86] of Christ"[87] (*Ep* 5:21), that is, "out of reverence for Christ". A right relationship of the wife towards her husband can be recognized only in this experience: "To sum up: you also, each one of you, must love his wife as he loves himself; and let every wife respect her husband" (*Ep* 5:33).[88] The mutual "submission" of Christians is based on the faith in Jesus Christ, recognized as the Lord, and this "submission" is expressed in the mutual service inspired by love.

The reciprocal submission of Christians, therefore, is reflected directly in the context of the conjugal relationship: "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord (*Ep* 5:22).[89] For the wives "submission" to their husbands is the concrete and existential way to fulfill the compromise of "walking in love" (ἐν ἀγάπῃ *Ep* 5:2). And the spousal "submission" of the wives is put in relation with the Lord (*Kurios* - Κύριος).

83. *New American Bible. The King James Version or Authorized Version* translates: "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" *(Ep* 5:21 *KJV*); "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (*Ep* 5:21 *NJB*); "Follow the lead of one another because of your respect for Christ" (*Ep* 5:21 *NIRV*); "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (*Ep* 5:21 *NJB*).

84. Ὑποτασσόμενοι: verb participle present passive nominative masculine plural from *ὑποτάσσὼ ὑποτάσσω*: "to subject," "to subordinate"—1. active; 2. passive: "to become subject" , "subject oneself," "to be subjected or subordinated," "to obey".

85. "When everything has been subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subjected to the One who has subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all" (*1Co* 15:28).

86. The concept of "fear" (*"timor Domini"*) stresses the dimension of "respect"; "to recognize" (Cf. *Rm* 13:3.4; *1P* 3:14; *Col* 3:22). The expression "in the fear of Christ" does not mean to be afraid of God. "The fear of God or Christ" reminds the children of God how little they are before God and His love, and that their happiness lies in abandoning themselves with humility, respect and trust into His hands.

87. ἐν φόβῳ χριστοῦ (*Ep* 5:21).

88. "Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband" (*Ep* 5:33 *KJV*).

89. "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord" (*Ep* 5:22 *NJB*).

In this context, the exhortation of Saint Paul for man to be the "head" (*tou* 頭): "The husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church. The church is Christ's body. He is its Savior" (*Ep* 5:23) is the genuine motivation for the husband to serve and sacrifice himself for his wife.

As we have already mentioned, around 75 percent of Catholics in Taiwan marry non-Catholics. There are positive experiences in which, for example, the husband is not baptized, however the wife—without saying many words—accompanies her husband by the way she lives.[90] The Christian community in Taiwan offers remarkable testimonies of "sanctification."[91]

Education on Complementarity

There is a need to gradually accompany youth in earlier stages along the path of education to complementarity (*liang xing xiang hu bu zu* 兩性相互補足) between male and female. Complementarity goes beyond a simplistic approach to sexes fixed in a single and static pattern. Complementarity takes many forms as each man and woman brings his or her distinctive contributions to their marriage and to the education of their children. It is important to communicate and foster an education centered on the beauty, fidelity and indissolubility of a relation of love.

A Call to Create and Offer Places and Time Where People Can Share Their Suffering

Many people do not have relationships with others. It is vital to prepare Christian communities[92] to receive, pay attention to new "languages" and accompany those who went through a painful experience of separation, divorce and abortion or those who are facing solitude, marginalization, and abandonment. Overcoming the rooted cultural challenge of losing face (*diu lian* 丟臉) is also an integrative dimension of this journey. The gift of faith, although weakened by difficult experiences, is always there and can awaken a true step towards charity, forgiveness and a change of life.

Within a dialogue that takes into account the concrete situation of the persons, there is a need to offer an answer to lifestyles related to homosexual people.[93]

"Family"[94] *in the New Testament*

Traditional Chinese culture reveres classic works (*jing* 經). The Bible is called *Sheng Jing* (聖經), that is, *Holy Scripture*-Classic. In this regard, the New Testament offers some

90. Cf. *1P* 3,1: "…they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives".

91. "For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband" (*1Co* 7,14).

92. The Church is seen as a big "family-house" where there is only one Father, the Heavenly Father (*Mt* 23,9) there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ (*1Co* 8,6), and only one Spirit, the filial Spirit (*Ga* 4,6).

93. Mutual rights and duties of homosexual partnerships.

94. Greek: Οἶκος, (*Oikos*): Latin *domus*; family, 家庭, (*jia ting)*. The etymology of family: early fifteenth century, "servants of a household," from Latin *familia* "family servants, domestics (*domus*) collectively, the

fundamental elements about the spirit and the way a nuclear family formed by believers lives. In the house family (*domus*) believers eat together "with thanksgiving" (*1Ti* 4:1–3); they practice hospitality (*Rm* 12:13; *Heb* 13:2); they respect marriage (*honorabile conubium in omnibus*), avoiding fornication and adultery (*Heb* 13:4); they honor father and mother (*Ep* 6:2); they do not stand idly by (*2Th* 3:10–12); they work with their own hands (*1Th* 4:11; *Ep* 4:28); they keep a temperate life, content with what they have, with confidence in the Divine Providence (*Heb* 13:5–6); they avoid carousing and drunkenness (*Rm* 13:13); they persevere in prayer (*Rm* 12:12) and share what they have (*Heb* 13:16) with a particular attention to the orphans, widows and the needs of their brothers (*Jm* 1:27; *Rm* 12:13); they do not speak evil of their brothers (*Jm* 4:11); they abstain from lying (*Ep* 4:25); they do not let unpleasant words come out of their mouth, or obscenity, foolish talk (*Ep* 4:29; 5:4); when in trouble, they pray, when they are happy, they sing songs of praise (*Jm* 5:13); when sick, they call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them (*Jm* 5:14); the spouses live in a way that they can pray together, but if there is lack of consideration and mutual honor, then prayer will be hindered (*1P* 3:7); for this reason it is necessary to reconcile with each other on the same day (*Ep* 4:26), to forgive one other (*Ep* 4:32); by mutual agreement for a time they may abstain from conjugal sexual intercourse to devote themselves to prayer (*1Co* 7:5); the fathers do not exasperate or provoke their children, to dishearten them (*Col* 3:21); the children obey their parents in all situations (*Col* 3:20); the wives follow the lead of their husbands (*Col* 3:18); and husbands love their wives without being bitter toward them (*Col* 3:19).

On family, the New Testament stresses the invitation to conversion, to abandon the pagan mentality and to put the Kingdom of God first.[95]

A FINAL WORD

The Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy

Pope Francis proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy *(Misericordiae Vultus)* as a special time, in particular for families in need of mercy, tenderness, comprehension, listening, sacrifice, forgiveness, and justice. Mercy, he said, is the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of the other person

servants in a household," thus also "members of a household, the estate, property; the household, including relatives and servants," from *famulus* "servant, slave," which is of unknown origin. The Latin word rarely appears in the sense "parents with their children," for which *domus* (domestic) was used. Derivatives of *famulus* include *famula* "serving woman, maid," *famulanter* "in the manner of a servant," *famulitas* "servitude," *familiaris* "of one's household, private," *familiaricus* "of household slaves," *familiaritas* "close friendship." At <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=family>.

95. Cf. J. Goetzmann, "Casa-Famiglia," in L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, H. Bietenhhard, eds, *Dizionario dei concetti biblici del Nuovo Testamento* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1986), 216–18. E. Cattaneo, "La famiglia, luogo di educazione alla fede," *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 2014, 3943: 49–58.

on the path of life. Mercy is the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.[96]

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96. Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, 11 April, 2015, at <https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html>.

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Conclusion

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All the essays included in this volume aimed at contributing to the understanding of continuities and ongoing transformations in contemporary Asian societies, through a thorough examination of the changing nature of a key social institution, namely, the family. Asian families are shifting in fundamental ways, demographically and in terms of attitudes towards family and societal relationships and the role of the family in society. These changes include an ageing population, delayed marriages, and the high status achieved by women who now seem to enjoy a quite important level of independence and freedom. Thus, the concept of "family" might be seen as a constant work-in-progress, a consistently changing set of culturally–imbued representations which provide its members with social support to make their lives and relationships more meaningful and legitimate. In any given society, an impressive diversity of visions exists as to what kind of family structures, ideologies and values should represent its people in the world.

Nevertheless today, even though the "family" seems to have remained the most basic unit of society, in as much as it continues to be regarded as the most important thing in one's life, there is a growing concern about the alleged decline of "family values" in association with the increasing divorce rate, domestic violence, and single parenthood. And one of the main factors contributing to the erosion of the traditional structure of the Asian family seems to be economic in nature. The mere dream of embracing all the opportunities for comfort offered by the globalized neo-liberal and capitalistic ideologies has inevitably produced a re-thinking and a re-shaping of the basic family unit. For example: there are people who are willing to sacrifice marital cohabitation and miss out on the childhood of their children in order to search for fortune in different countries. There are individuals who decide to postpone getting married in order to pursue their careers. There are young people who increasingly invest their energies in the satisfaction of personal lifestyles to the detriment of forming a family. All these motivations certainly help to identify the family as a coping mechanism that adapts to, and also shapes, broader demographic, economic and social changes.

This is especially evident if we briefly consider the historic stages that have contributed to the transformation of the traditional family structure.

The role of the extended family, which was dominant and widespread in every traditional cultural milieu in Asia, is progressively losing ground in Japan and in Taiwan. In Bangladesh, the Philippines and Indonesia, this transformation is slower, but it seems to be leading inevitably towards the same outcome. This means that the main pillars of today's Asian families include the rights and dignity of the individual, the freedom to choose one's partner, a more equalitarian vision of the roles of women and men, a way of bringing up children that places greater emphasis on love and understanding than on dominion and imposition of rules. Moreover, modern families often enjoy a financial autonomy that makes them less dependent on their relatives. On the other hand, this trend also brings some weaknesses to the surface, especially because modern nuclear families can count solely on their internal strength and resources to preserve their unity and to cope with external threats and challenges.

Nevertheless, the nuclear family does not seem to be the end-point of such a process. The evolution of the concept of family has already gone beyond this position, producing new and complex phenomena within modern society. Especially in urban contexts, the familial structure itself is under threat and seems to be considered as something that is no longer essential. Increasing divorce rates, abortion, domestic violence, cohabitation outside marriage, inability to find a partner, social parasitism and isolation (*hikikomori* phenomena), and same sex relationships, are examples of today's complex typology of the problems that are in some way related to the transformation of the familial concept.

In this regard, the Church can greatly contribute to the strengthening of the family by providing, first of all, an alternative space where the youth could be better educated in terms of relationships, sexuality and life-long commitment. The education received in

schools may not always care for the total good of the person, but may be at the service of other interests as well.

Secondly, by providing those who are already married, but going through moments of crisis, a space where couples can talk and be properly listened to, a venue where healing and reconciliation could be achieved. Often, couples opt too quickly for separation and divorce, while in fact it should be a last resort. Undoubtedly, the sharing in the confessional, though important, is not enough. The ministry of accompanying couples ought to be interdisciplinary and conducted by a team that includes a pastor, but also a psychologist, a lawyer and other specialized advisers.

Thirdly, the Church should never be content to only deal with the symptoms of the problem. It would be a great service to identify the real root causes of what leads families into crisis. In certain places, poverty is surely the "silent killer of families," forcing spouses to separate for work, rendering the whole family bonds vulnerable to be even destroyed.

The Church is certainly in the condition to help people to be critical regarding certain anti-family trends that are often very attractively presented by the entertainment business and telenovelas. On the other hand, the moralizing language in the Church regarding sex, virginity, dysfunctional families, single parents, divorced couples, homosexual partnerships, etc., may contribute to close young people's ears and turn them off to whatever else the Church has to say. But, since what is really at stake is the capacity to live life in communion due to an ever growing environment that favors individualism, the Church, more than anything else is the proper place where people can learn and experience communion and alterity. God's dream expressed in *Genesis* (that man and woman leave their parents in order to be one flesh and one soul) still maintains its appeal—even though its sacredness must necessarily bear in mind our human frailty and sinfulness.

Cumulative Index

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Family Changes

Starting from the forthcoming synod of the Catholic Church on the Family, the essays collected in this book are a modest attempt at a reflection on the same topic, centred, however, on five different Asian contexts, that is, those of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines and Taiwan. Aging population, declining births and marriages, mono-parental families, plural and diverse family models, domestic violence, divorce, prolonged absence of parents and market dynamics, all contribute to situate the modern family in a sort of confused melting pot. Indeed, the modern family finds itself in the middle of a great transition, which, while leaving unclear its final port of destination, nevertheless allows us to clearly envisage the complexity of the refashioning it is bound to undergo. While the papers tend to analyse, and hence emphasize the challenges confronting the modern family, the research, at the same time, also points out that the family institution has regularly proved to be very flexible and resistant in the face of various historical and social changes —From the Introduction