THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE FILIPINO WOMAN

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ABSTRACT. This critical review of the representations of Filipino women in social science research aims to throw light on the ideological and theoretical assumptions that hinder an accurate depiction of women's subordinate status. It begins with an exposition of how native lore touting women's superiority, recast with the appropriate rationale by colonial discourse, is etched in popular consciousness and has proven resistant to alteration. Conventional wisdom, for example, views the housewife's pursekeeper function along with household management as evidence of matriarchy. In examining the more significant empirical studies, in particular, those within the women-in-development category, the essay notes a slight departure from this perspective. Confronted with the reality of extensive poverty and women's location at the bottom of the occupational structure, social scientists have had to acknowledge women's inequality in the public sphere. Turning their focus on the private sphere, researchers document the existence of a rigid gender division of labor at the heart of the family. This finding results in the displacement of the notion of a matriarchy. But unaided by feminist frameworks, investigators fall short of interrogating the power relations embedded in gender assignments in the household. They fail to unmask the sanctified role of motherhood and the attendant valorization of women as morally superior. Instead, studies concentrating on decision-making have simply substituted egalitarianism for women's dominance and upheld the idea of gender complementarity based on the philosophy of "separate spheres."

In this essay, I will critically review the representations of Filipino women in the pertinent literature and analyze the historical conditions of their emergence. By contextualizing Filipino women and defining their construction as a mediated social process, I hope to elucidate the terrain on which practices of speech and action operate. Finally, I will examine the intervention of contemporary social science in the shaping of women's subjectivity and attempt to uncover the theoretical assumptions informing current paradigms.

THE MYTHICAL VERSUS THE EMPIRICAL

If women have been the major casualties of modernization in the Philippines, particularly in the years following martial law, very little of
that can be detected from the images of Filipino women projected by social science research, the media, or popular mythology. At best, a "balanced" assessment deriving from empirically based studies yields conceptualization somewhat out of kilter with the actual conditions of women's lives. The belief in women's high status is deeply inscribed in popular consciousness and draws support from many sources, among them the native legend of creation. Unlike the biblical account, the tale asserts the simultaneous emergence of woman and man from a bamboo cylinder split open by the pecking of a large bird. Despite the dire straits of the majority of women, mainstream social science has been unable to explode such myths. It has merely substituted the "ambiguous Filipina" for the "domineering Filipina" of conventional wisdom.

This ambiguity is rendered with a panegyrical tone by journalist Guerrero-Napkil (1975) in the following selection:

There have been three men in her life: her Asiatic ancestor, the Spanish friar, the American, and like Chekov's Darling, she echoes all the men she has known in her person. Perhaps in a few generations, the Filipina will crystallize into a clear, pure, internally calm, symmetrical personality with definite facets in the predictable planes. Perhaps in time, the different strains which now war within her in mongrel contradictions will have been assimilated into a thoroughbred homogeneity. But when that happens, the Filipina woman will have lost the infinite unexpectedness, the abrupt contrariness, the plural predictability which now makes her both so womanly and so Filipino. (pp. 19, 25)

This declaration of worth, while understandable as an attempt to assert an individuality or uniqueness denied to colonials, subsists on a metaphysical plane. It avoids placing the Filipina in a concrete context where some estimation of her actual status can be made.

In contrast, sociologist Castillo (1976) employs a more down-to-earth appraisal of women's position through a survey of existing literature. She begins with a summary of the varied representations of women from which appears

a woman of contradictory assets and facets—a woman who represents at least a double vision. She is said to be exalted by history and tradition to a pedestal and yet she is low in the pecking order. There are arguments as to whether she still fashions herself as . . . "coy, retiring, and subservient. . . ." On the other hand, she is supposed to have power and influence unofficially and in private. (p. 12)

Then turning to the empirical level where she demarcates ten aspects of women's lives, Castillo arrives at a "comprehensive data profile" that proves equally perplexing:

The Filipino woman seems to have her heart set at being "feminine." What are the components of feminismo? The studies and images which have been reviewed lead us to a few guesses as to what some of these components might be. The Filipino woman wants to get married; to have children (childlessness or even a one-child marriage is not preferred); to be subordinate yet equal; to be seductive
without being seduced; to be beautiful; to be educated; to be a companion to her husband; and a mother to her children. (p. 250, underscoring hers)

Why this bewildering welter of images, this fanciful quality suffusing these descriptions when the social reality leaves slight room for misinterpretation?

It could be that the high regard for women, in most instances no more than an elaborate conceit, is an ideological vestige of their relatively privileged position prior to Spanish colonial penetration. Among women's rights and privileges effectively destroyed by Spanish Civil Law were the right to divorce, to have children regardless of marital status, property rights, freedom to contract business arrangements independently of the husband, retention of maiden name, and a central role in religious practices. Yet so great is the predilection for seeing only superior ways in the conqueror races (and, conversely, inferiority in the conquered) that the mutilation of historical evidence proceeds with unusual facility. Witness the following passage written in 1905 by James LeRoy, one of the first observers of the Philippine scene after the conquest by the United States:

It is perfectly safe to say that in no other part of the Orient have women relatively so much freedom or do they play so large a part in the control of the family or in social or even industrial affairs. It is a common remark that Filipino women, both the privileged and of the lower classes, are possessed of more character and often, too, of more enterprise, than the men. There seems every reason for ascribing this relative improvement in the position of women in the Philippines as compared with surrounding countries in the Orient to the influence of the Christian religion and the position which they have assumed under the teaching of the Church and the directorship of the friars. (pp. 27-28)

Curiously enough, any reference to Filipino women's privileges preceding the intrusion of Christianity has been elided. On the contrary, by stating that their position has improved, any suspicion that women may have been better off in the past has been deftly cleared away. This view (Le-Roy's work to date retains standing as an authoritative source) blazed the trail for many an imperial apologia in the decades to come. It functions effectively in inculcating in Filipinos the instinct for self-denigration indispensable to the status quo.

1 The single most important source of information about beliefs and practices surrounding women during this period is Infante (1975). Other useful readings are Alzona (1934) and Mendoza-Guazon (1951).

Vulnerable to the charge of class reductionism, a more recent essay (Mananzan, 1983) offers substantial support for the detrimental effects of colonization. This support comes in the form of historical documents written in Spanish.

2 For an elucidation of how “Occidental” intellectuals create and maintain representations or images of the periphery vital to Western hegemony, see Edward W. Said (1978). For an illumination of the ways in which power in general is manifested through culture and ideology, see Rabinow (1984).
THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE COLONIAL MIND

Ensnared within the master's field of vision, the native (usually male, the preferred object of colonizing efforts) exposes his self-concept to inevitable damage. Having accepted the former's rendition of history, he develops an awkward propensity for self-contradiction. Within these boundaries it is not unusual to find good colonials affirming the fact that in pre-Spanish times women had civil and political rights parallel to men. In the same breath they concede priority to the colonizer's exclusivist perspective. If such distortions exemplified by LeRoy can occur vis-à-vis Spain, a universally hated colonial power, imagine how the contrast between Spanish and U.S. colonial policy which advocated women's suffrage, established a system of public education, and granted equal formal access to women and men, could easily turn the carefully nurtured myth of its benevolence into fact!

In a widely prescribed social science reader written by Filipinos (Macaraig, Espiritu, & Bernardino, 1954; the main writer, Serafin Macaraig, wrote the first Philippine sociology textbook in 1938), the authors attribute "matriarchal tendencies" in the family to the power held by women before the Spanish conquest. Only a page earlier, they had declared the following: "The Filipino family has been influenced by both Oriental and Occidental traits. The predominating influence of the man over the woman is characteristically Oriental, while the growing acceptance today of the equality of man and woman is Occidental" (p. 152). Unfortunately, assertions as glaringly fallacious as these constitute a prototype of the schizoid colonial mind whose subaltern conditioning is finally capped with the illusion of freedom under U.S. tutelage.

That the more privileged Filipinos would be the most susceptible to this propaganda should not be surprising. When, under U.S. rule, women's limited career roles of teacher, nun, or spinster (the last two the most prized because of the premium Catholicism conferred on virginity) were expanded to include new professional opportunities, lavish praises, rooted in ignorance, were heaped upon the conquerors. In The Development and Progress of the Filipino Woman written in 1951, Maria Paz Mendoza-Guazon, the first Filipina medical doctor, exalted this turn of events: "There has never been in the history of the world such a noble and magnanimous program of government as that proclaimed by President McKinley on January 30, 1898" (p. 49). Accepting without question the latter's declaration that the Philippine Commission bestowed only "the richest blessings of a liberating rather than a conquering nation" (p. 49), Mendoza-Guazon and others of her class only served to confound an already inaccurate depiction of how women's status had evolved.

Writing in 1917 another woman of the elite, Pura Villanueva de Kalaw, admitted the possibility that "the accounts of history do not do full justice to... the Filipino," especially "the Filipino woman who, in the
family and the home, has succeeded in preserving her own personality” (p. 32). Not without a touch of absurdity, Villanueva de Kalaw appraises as salutary the outcome of Spanish women’s racist shunning of “intercourse with the native woman.” This, coupled with the Catholic edict decreeing marriage indissoluble, were measures that for her highlighted, preserved, and secured women’s status within the family. Her paean to the United States is astonishing: “The great land of feminism has brought us, with her flag, her principles of democracy and equality which places woman on a level with men, not only as regards her rights, but also as regards her duties towards the nation” (pp. 35-36). This opinion is tempered only with her fear that the encroachment of Western individualism into Philippine life with “the introduction of the Saxon educational influence will result in serious peril to the beautiful cohesion of the Filipino family.”

**TWO CONTRASTING VIEWS**

Interestingly enough, the only piece in the early colonial period of U.S. colonialism that has taken a critical look at imperialism and class differences in women’s position within a subject nation is that by U.S. journalist Agnes Smedley published in a progressive journal in India in 1931. In it she calls attention precisely to the world view that, like the foregoing, blindly duplicated representations of women and of Filipinos in general that had been fabricated to rationalize and justify territorial imperatives. If U.S. domination indicated progress over Spanish feudalism, she saw its evidence in “a type of middle- and upper-class woman that aspires above all else to be small copies of American middle- and upper-class women” (Smedley, 1931, p. 456). She refers to the intellectual bondage of this group as “so complete that it is unconscious.” While recognizing the advantages of a universal education for such women (she observes that 30 have law degrees, but none practice), she is keenly sensitive to the disastrous result of the use of English as the official medium of instruction: “spiritlessness, an utter lack of originality or of any creative or critical thinking ability” (p. 458). Her obvious affinity with worker and peasant women emerges in her sympathetic description of their situation. She underlines the impact of bad working conditions upon workers in foreign-owned factories geared for export production and the miserly pay of domestic piecework. On the farm, peasant women—a few of whom were union organizers—share work equally with men (“or perhaps more than equally”), the strenuousness of field labor leavened by “lovely peasant songs of labor” (p. 460).

To appreciate the perspicacity of Agnes Smedley’s barely four-page essay, compare and contrast its substance with scattered comments on women by U.S. anthropologist Felix Keesing (1937) in a book published within the same decade. On several key points, the two agree: as manag-
ers of the home, a relic of an earlier division of labor, women take charge of the household income. From this responsibility arises a penchant for business that, according to Keesing, deploys women as small traders offering competition to about 10,000 Chinese establishments in Manila and the provinces. Observing that "to their lot fell most of the routine of economic activity other than the heaviest labor (p. 27), he notes that within a family system marked by cooperation, loyalty, and dutifulness to elders, women maintain a highly respected position. The power of this familial ideology in which the image of Filipino women is etched will register its impact upon the minds of Filipinos for the next half-century.

Where Smedley and Keesing part ways is in their perception of the influence of the Western metropolis. While the former indicts the Catholic church of the Spanish regime as the "chief pillar of subjection" (Smedley, p. 458), the latter merely skims the surface when he writes: "The romantic attitude of the Latin towards those of the female sex has affected the status of women and customs of courtship and marriage" (Keesing, p. 37). Applying the same mind-set to the U.S. era, Keesing takes the movement for women's right to vote at face value, regarding it as "a significant feature of that period" (p. 98). In contrast, Smedley disparages the Federation of Women's Clubs which acted as a vanguard for the suffrage movement. For her the Federation was a pale imitation of its U.S. counterpart that did "nothing whatever that would arouse the least opposition or criticism from the most orthodox and respectable women of their class in America or in the Philippines" (p. 458).

To make yet another comparison and to see the manner in which the Filipino elite not merely yielded to but surpassed the imperialist discourse of conventional observers, recall Keesing's matter-of-fact assertion of the significance of suffrage and set that against Villaneuva de Kalaw's version: "Filipino women, finally, are each day taking their places in the Government offices, the commercial establishments, the schools, and in all the fields of activity where an altar is erected to progress and work" (p. 36). One might justifiably label such utterances as symptoms of obsequiousness, of thorough indoctrination, or of plain blindness to everything but the interest of class.

AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW

Without rejecting any or all of the above, perhaps another way of looking at the matter might be more helpful, that offered by Pierre

3Others in more recent times have reevaluated the women's suffrage movement that culminated in the right to vote in 1973 as a diversionary tactic employed by U.S. authorities in the Philippines to weaken the more threatening movement for independence (Santos-Maranan, 1984).
Macherey as he expounds on the Althusserian concept of the ideological state apparatus (Mercer & Radford, 1977). Bourgeois ideology, according to him, must be seen as a well-constructed, coherent totality from which there is no escape once entered into because of its veneer of consolidation. This apparently coherent system of beliefs is actually ridden with contradictions. But these contradictions are plastered over by all kinds of mechanisms for the precise purpose of creating a semblance of consistency. Such a view at once enables us to interpret and evaluate the phenomenon of the "colonial mentality," the manifestations of which we have seen in a sampling of Filipino intellectuals. Our aim is to examine and unmask the ideological apparatuses (for example, Philippine experience as transcribed by LeRoy and Keesing) through which the compliance of Filipinos is maintained. Furthermore, it is when outsiders to the particular ideology—Agnes Smedley, in this case—peel off the imaginary to reveal the actual that we begin to decipher the myth. Smedley states outright that her perception of Filipino women is colored by the striking contrast provided by revolutionary women in China, her point of departure on her Philippine visit. Extending the tools of class analysis, she draws out the potential power of worker and peasant women in their very exclusion from the main ideological citadels and in their unity as exploited groups.

The impossibility of neatly disentangling conceptualizations of Filipino womanhood from the ideologies of colonial domination should now become readily apparent. From this it follows that to challenge assumptions about Filipino women and reconstruct their history necessitates nothing less than the simultaneous defiance and destruction of imperial authority. Unless and until this happens and unless we become alert to half-truths and gaps glossed over by ideology, cultural constructs will continue to obfuscate the experience of Filipino women. These imposed constructs will continue to perpetuate a curious patchwork of impressions that meld the illusion of female preeminence with the reality of submission.

DECONSTRUCTING POPULAR MYTHS

Easily the most widely accepted motif is that of woman as "queen of the home." Synonymous with the status denoted by the "power behind the throne," it has its antecedents in pre-Spanish times, but the belief today is linked with the pursekeeper service performed by the wife. Seen as a logical extension of this function is the business acumen that women are expected to automatically possess. In an essay which attempts to

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4Spanish chronicler Father Pedro Chirino, writing about the Philippines at the beginning of the 17th century, noted that the role for the Filipino wife in Manila, Marinduque, and Panay was to be "queen of the home" (Mendoza-Guazon, 1951, pp. 12, 32).
reclaim women's past by reconstructing the works of early chroniclers, the authors conclude that the Filipina's entrepreneurial ability was even then her most salient feature (Rausa-Gomez & Tubangui, 1978). A study investigating the role of women managers in family-owned businesses begins this way: "Proverbially, the person who holds the purse strings rules the house. In the Philippines, it is the woman who does so and who therefore runs the home as in matriarchal societies" (Alvarez & Alvarez, 1973, p. 547). Prefaced by such a statement, the conclusion cannot be altogether surprising: "The Filipina does not need to be liberated because in fact, she already dominates the home and family businesses as well" (p. 560). Moreover, the public visibility of a few individual women of influence has helped preserve the idea of dominance, exaggerating its dimensions to guarantee the Filipino woman's superiority over other Asian women and even over "her Western counterparts."

With his wife exercising "disproportionate power," what is a husband to do to buttress his endangered manliness but to find succor in the arms of a mistress, a querida (Shahani, 1975)? Although this facile rationale enunciated by a woman ambassador has gathered few adherents, the evocations of an innate female morality is a common response to the sexual double standard. Standing as her husband's moral guardian lest he savor more than occasional peccadillos, the wife—her devoutness tested by unflagging church attendance—now additionally becomes anointed as the voice of social conscience. The essentialist argument investing women with a maternal instinct and its derivative moral authority can hardly be modulated: "The Filipino woman will always play her part either at home or in the legislature as a true MOTHER [author's capitalization] because she has at heart the progress and advancement of her country, and the protection of our womanhood and childhood" (Mendoza-Guazon, 1931, p. 16). Holding the "psychological key to the economic development problems that beset our country," women not only have a "sobering influence in family life" but are also exhorted to curb the male inclination for overindulgence in politics and to direct children toward developing a taste for local products (Reyes, 1965).

That these ideas persist in spite of the undeniably distressed situation of ordinary women, most of its symptoms visible to the human eye, must attest to some need to sustain these collective sentiments. Whatever the case, even social scientists seeking "objectivity" seem so eager to corroborate women's presumed high status that even glaring disparities in the law fall short of bringing to light women's actual condition. A recognized authority on women and legal rights, Florinda Ruth P. Romero (1979, 1981), states that the field of domestic relations is the one area in law where major revisions are required to offset gender inequality.5 One

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5A revised family code that took effect in July 1988 has removed some of the more blatant gender biases in family law.
might assume that information like this would quickly banish misperceptions about the power and influence of women. Yet U.S. anthropologist Robert Fox (1963), studying Filipino women and men, the family and kinship relations, can discuss the law and its applications to the family (for instance, that legal separation is granted differentially, requiring adultery of the wife and concubinage of the husband) and still fail to interrogate women's so-called high social position.

The findings of Fox and that of Filipino social investigators in the sixties and early seventies are encapsulated in the paragraph below. Its main arguments are not far removed from common lore as sketched earlier:

The continuous support given to a wife by her family and kin is one of the reasons for the strong position of women in Filipino society. She is the central figure in the family, wife, mother, treasurer and disburser of funds. In accordance with the traditional Filipino custom, now a part of the Civil Code, the property which a woman brings to marriage is her own and she may do as she likes over its disposition. Enjoying an equal status with her husband, she nevertheless gives him the illusion that he is lord and master of his household. Although she accepts a form of double morality, the males being allowed freedom denied the female members of her family, her informal influence in society often affects the economic and political affairs of the country. (Nelson, 1968, p. 100)

Here we note that pronouncements of women's superiority have been pared down to the more prudent designation of the wife as the "central figure in the family." Conceptions of "dominance" have been replaced with the comparatively concessionary associations of "strong position," "equal status," and "informal influence."

TOWARD A REVALUATION OF THE CONSENSUS

Although it was not until the UN declaration of International Women's Year in 1975 that studies specifically centering on women were undertaken, the findings of the sixties and seventies took off from the perspective just mentioned. These received notions were subjected to close scrutiny through empirical investigation. In due course, particularly with the focus on women and development, attention was drawn to the reality of mass poverty, and the image of the dominant Filipino woman scoffing at the implication that she might need liberation began to blur. In short, flights of fancy which the subject of women customarily evokes had necessarily to be curtailed in the confrontation with unmitigated economic hardship.

First to be cast out was the notion that women are influential in the public sphere, a belief found to be falsely predicated on the few women leaders whose presence in government and education receive wide publici-
Complacency resting on the supposed preponderance of women in the professions quickly dissipated with new data. Chief of these is the information that the largest concentrations are in teaching and nursing, both low-paying occupations, and that those who combine motherhood and career comprise less than 3% of all married women. By the same token, social scientists disclosed that even upper-class women who achieve entry into the public sphere do so through the women's auxiliaries of their husbands' organizations. Consequently, their ability to make decisions is in large measure circumscribed (Montiel & Hollnsteiner, 1978). In fact, there is no space within the public sphere—not national or local government, nor business or the professions, not even in the field of education where woman predominate—where women exert decision-making power (Gonzalez & Hollnsteiner, 1976). It was made distinctly clear that women have higher unemployment and underemployment rates, are placed in manual and menial jobs, and receive consistently lower cash earnings relative to men in the same industry and occupational group (Castillo, 1976). In effect, "to adequately assess and measure women's participation in the development process" (Eviota, 1978, p. 1), an objective formulated under the aegis of USAID, researchers were compelled to surrender prior inventions to make way for a redefinition of the Filipina more in line with the new data collected.

Given these empirical studies and their scientific thrust, why the continuing mystification of women? Why the image of "the ambiguous Filipina"? A theory of sexual asymmetry, embryonic though it may be, has begun to inform inquiries into women's status in the public domain. But elsewhere—in the home to be exact, where the ideological fog permeating family relations is particularly dense—the hallowed theme of woman as mother and wife has so far eluded interrogation.

**MAPPING THE DOMESTIC TERRITORY**

Cognizant of the instances of public inequality and the juridical subordination of women in the world of work as well as in the private one of the home, social researchers shifted the ground to the domestic realm. Their intention was to determine the patterns of behavior obtaining within the convention of family life. These attempts focused on gender roles and expectations, with all studies substantiating the idealized image of the family along with the accepted notions of femininity and masculinity. One case deserves prior citation. Querying their informants about the ideal wife and husband in a study on attitudes toward family planning, Lynch and Makil (1968) received responses that could not have been more stereotypical. The ideal husband is perceived as a good provider and morally good (i.e., faithful to his wife), while the ideal wife is a good household manager, industrious, and free of vice. This model of a rigidly
defined sexual division of labor is borne out by other researchers who proceeded to investigate the whole repertoire of gender-differentiated behavior in the household. (Illo, 1977; Gonzalez, 1977, Porio, Lynch, & Hollnsteiner, 1981; Mendez & Jocano, 1974). Backed by legal mandate declaring the husband "responsible for the support of his wife and the rest of the family" and the wife as charged with "the affairs of the household" (Romero, 1979, p. 4), there is practically no deviation from this pattern; that is, the spheres of activity within the home are sharply demarcated. This expectation overruns class division, for even women of the upper class risk social censure by not fulfilling, no doubt in different ways, the "desirable minimum home production time" (Illo, 1978, p. 15). Finding housekeeping the monopoly of women in her study of the "life concerns" of women, men, and unmarried daughters, Jeanne F. Illo (1977) imputes the base of support of this practice to the "implicit logic . . . heavily founded on a stronger–weaker sex distinction" (p. 59). Females performed the tasks of dishwashing, home yard cleaning, washing and ironing clothes, child care, and marketing; males took charge of home repair, fetching water, and gathering firewood.

Anna Miren B. Gonzalez (Gonzales & Hollnsteiner, 1976), interviewing poor women from urban, semi-urban, and rural communities, noted how securely welded women were to duties linked with home management and family life, and men with family life and occupation. Where there was a crossover of tasks, perceptions refused alteration: men saw themselves mainly in an economic role despite their participation in housework, and women with remunerative work did not see themselves as family providers. For Gonzalez there is no denying the tenacity of the woman-for-the-home dictum. This is a conclusion totally in accord with that of Illo (1977), who further discovered that women concur with men regarding household obligations typically envisaged for women to carry out almost exclusively.

The biological logic underpinning the household division of labor as inferred by Illo is given clear, unmistakable expression by Mendez and Jocano (1974) in their study of urban and rural families. The following excerpt from their book describes gender assignment in the latter group:

The physical aspects, such as choice of where to live, the building of the house as well as the planning of improvement, are more the husband's task. These imply constructing; building; hauling wood, bamboo, and other heavy materials. Obviously, the heavier tasks are reserved for men. Child rearing and household management (including use of appliances) are the wife's domain. These are related to biology. Since child bearing has been assigned to her by nature, child rearing necessarily follows, for this involves nurturance. The mother has to stay with the child most of the time. The running of a household consequently became allied to child rearing. For this reason, the Baras [the town under study] husband considers going to market a woman's task since it is related to running the household. No Baras husband does the marketing according to our survey.
Here it is difficult to extricate the authors' point of view from that of their subjects. Since nowhere in the book can be discerned the slightest questioning of this essentialist gender ideology, it is tempting to equate the representation of sexually differentiated tasks as biologically based— and therefore natural and fixed—as both the respondents' and the authors'. At the very least, one can safely assume a congruence of opinion.

This presumption is relatively easy to make in view of the stance taken by other researchers on the subject. Illo (1977), for example, repeatedly cautions against development projects involving women that are not contingent on the preservation of marital harmony. Certainly one might quite simply attribute this recommendation to an overriding concern for efficacious programs, which is precisely how she puts it. Nevertheless, it is impossible to imagine this degree of assurance if there were any serious doubts about the normality or naturalness of gender arrangements upon which domestic peace is built. In a review of studies exploring women's response to expanded assignments with the assumption of extradomestic paid work, Castillo and Guerrero (1969) endorse multiple roles for women without hesitation. They authenticate through studies of working women the adroit juggling of paid and unpaid work that women are able to accomplish ("she even manages to arrange his clothes, sew missing buttons and darn socks," p. 22). Like Illo's acquiescence to the ideal of familial tranquility to which wives in her study felt pledged, this prescription is conceivable only because the family unit and the roles of mother and wife with their concomitant obligations are received, if not as divine decree, as naturally given. This being the case, the authors can launch into a whimsical projection of the possibilities awaiting the Filipino woman once she takes a job:

In so far as she makes a choice and is able to perform the dual or triple role she has chosen for herself, she will remain a creatively versatile person maximizing her self-fulfillment, her contribution to the family, the community, and society in general.

They warn of the dangers of ambivalence, or of refusing the broadened definition of femininity:

But when she gives up one role at the expense of another, but at the same time "pines and whines" for what might have been or could be, then she becomes a powder keg of trouble—always rejecting what she is and never satisfied with what she has. (p. 24)

Although perhaps not intending to disparage their own gender, the researchers' enervating assessment of female capabilities comes through clearly. Their view posits, at minimum, the acceptance of a female es-
sence—in this specific instance, a capriciousness requiring the ballast afforded by masculine rationality—that carries the ratification of society as a whole. Observe the deprecation of female enterprise implicit in conventional jokes about “old maids,” an epithet that includes any woman who remains single at the ripe age of 25 (Castillo, 1976, p. 45).

Here is Castillo once again, this time summing up her study examining attitudes of high school students toward the wife who engages in paid employment:

Very few respondents considered the working wife completely unacceptable although there were sex differences observed. . . . The boys tended to be more restrictive than the girls. On the other hand, the girls reported a high degree of willingness to defer to husband’s wishes. (Castillo, 1976, p. 193)

Concerning Guerrero’s investigation of husband-wife roles in a college community, she states: “Although husbands’ definition of the wife’s ‘proper’ role is mostly that of a wife and mother, the majority of them nevertheless approve of their wives’ working” (p. 194).

Susceptible to configurational reading, these same two studies produce an interpretation somewhat at variance with Castillo’s in the hands of Porio, Lynch, and Hollnsteiner (1981). The three draw the straightforward conclusion that the wife’s outside occupation constitutes a threat to the husband’s capacity as a wage earner and emphasizes as actual, not potential, the resultant tension between wives and husbands. Manifestly more lucid, perhaps in part owing to the pragmatic mandate of their institutional affiliation,6 these researchers urge the juxtaposition of traditional attitudes with the exigencies of economic survival to punctuate the need for change. Their vision for the future is optimistic. They predicted that after International Women’s Year growing numbers of women would voice a preference to join the labor force and would do so (note the wistfulness) “ideally but not necessarily with the husband’s approval” (p. 52).

THE WOMAN AS HOUSEHOLD WORKER

Without a doubt, the social definition of the Filipino woman as household worker—imaginative allusions to her “queenly” station notwithstanding—is difficult for the public and for social scientists alike to relinquish. This conception is not entirely incorrect. It is based on the fact

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6The Institute of Philippine Studies, according to its blurb, “combines a theoretical orientation, drawn usually from the social sciences, and a commitment to results that aim at an improvement in the life quality of the masses.” Porio, Lynch & Hollnsteiner each had, at one time or another, held positions of responsibility at the Institute.
that 70% of Filipino wives 15 years and older perceive themselves as housekeepers whose primary occupation transpires in the home, with only one-fourth regarding their paid work as their main activity. The average wife spends eight or more hours a day over 29 days each month performing housekeeping duties (Castillo, 1976, p. 244). Castillo (1976, p. 210) cites the 1973 National Demographic Survey which places at 2% the number of households with hired help. The fiction enunciating the graceful ease with which Filipino women combine paid work and motherhood, one that relies on the availability of domestics, is easily exposed by questioning employed mothers of young children about how familial responsibilities conflict with career opportunities.

Both Illo’s study of households in the Bicol region and Gonzalez’ interviews with poor families yield estimates verifying the figures above. Illo (1977, p. 15) found that more than one-third of mothers’ home production time, averaging 46 hours a week, is expended in child care and over one-fourth in food preparation. Gonzalez’ investigation arrived at a daily average of 8.7 hours of household labor, with the following regional variations: rural, 11.1 hours, semi-urban, 6.3 hours, and urban, 8.8 hours (Gonzalez & Hollnsteiner, 1976, p. 99). Refining this point further, Miralao (1980) applied time-use methodology for a more accurate assessment of gender-based participation in the domestic and public spheres. She uncovered conspicuously inequitable work shares within households, with husbands contributing a mere third of their wives’ time, equivalent time occurring only in traditionally structured marriages where husbands’ market work matched wives’ domestic labor. Moreover, it is not simply the expenditure of invisible labor that domestic service entails. It also exacts, besides this unremitting labor of love, a degree of self-abnegation that only those prepared by training for this role can deliver. Ancheta (1982) cites a survey of three farming barangays (villages) in Batangas in which the researchers grouped women’s daily activities under three headings: home production, market production, and personal consumption. A glance at the table representing day-to-day chores quickly suggests that in a 4 a.m.–8 p.m. routine, the only moments for “personal consumption” occur between 1 and 2 p.m. and after eight at night, with the activity involved a purely recuperative one — rest and sleep.

WHY THE PERSISTENCE OF MYTHS?

If current social science literature retains few illusions about women’s status in the public domain and, beyond this, has quantified their performance of the daily housechores, by what sleight of hand is the notion of their “high position in the family” sustained? To be sure, the concept of “status” and its loose usage has retarded the comprehension of wom-
en's actual standing vis-à-vis men within the Philippine socioeconomic and political structure. When Montiel and Hollnsteiner (1978, pp. 4-6) arrived at an operational definition that narrowed the meaning of status to the degree of participation in both domestic and public activities and the benefit derived therefrom, an important guidepost was erected which set the terms for future inquiry.

Already referred to earlier, a practice that is still a subject of dispute is the wife's function as family treasurer. The view that she who holds the purse rules the roost, patently anchored in a species of vulgar materialism, locates woman's power in what is interpreted as her key economic role within the family. Its detractors accept the basic postulate but argue that, given the destitution suffered by most households, management of scant resources cannot constitute a base of power (Montiel & Hollnsteiner, 1978, p. 15; Gonzalez & Hollnsteiner, 1976, p. 100).

But the importance of plenitude or scarcity is disregarded or de-emphasized by those who would transmute the mundane, tedious, and burdensome duty of housekeeping into that of “household management” and who celebrate as the wife's “financial prerogative” the painful charge in poverty-stricken families of trying to make ends meet. Rutten (1982), writing about women workers of a sugarcane hacienda on the island of Negros, takes her cue from Robert Fox and Filipino anthropologist F. Landa Jocano in equating support from family and the female network in the community with wives' “dominant position” (p. 53). Overcast with vaguely coherent constructions of the Filipino woman like the ones already discussed, her perception of the women she observes for eight months is unaided by her acquaintance with feminist frameworks, including the Marxist feminist paradigm. She enters the world of these women adopting the assumptions of preceding studies. Enamored of the conception of wives as managers, she has thereby occluded the subsistence level that is the object of their management. While the wife's treasurer role is still habitually summoned as the crux of women's supposed family-based power in everyday discourse and in works like Rutten's, it is however gradually becoming contentious territory among social researchers.

THE TERRAIN OF POWER IN THE FAMILY

The terrain on which “experts” have finally converged, despite divergent starting points, is family decision making. The significance of this focus cannot be overplayed. We should point out how empirical studies are mainly responsible for validating “equality” in decision making within the household, and how current formulations surrounding the Filipino woman's “ambiguous” status ultimately invoke such studies. It is interesting to observe that in approaching this facet of family relations,
social scientists have sought to overturn adversarial notions: that the Filipino family is patriarchal or patricentric, matriarchal or matricentric, authoritarian, traditional, et cetera. On occasion, they employ incongruent classifications simultaneously. Porio, Lynch, and Hollnsteiner (1981) assert that their own cross-class study which disclosed an egalitarian mode in six decision-making areas defied expectations that a peasant-based society like the Philippines would be authoritarian. Their results indicated that both parents make decisions regarding the discipline of children, choice of child's school, and family investments. The child decides on the choice of school and friends; the final area, household budgeting, is the wife's exclusive territory. This pattern is replicated by Illo's (1977) subjects for whom family planning, recreation, and children's participation in extra-family activities are matters for wife and husband to decide equally. Licuanan and Gonzalez' (1976) explorations among the lower classes produced the same results: women exercise influence over household chores, child care, discipline of female children, and family finances; men's spheres of influence include his livelihood and the discipline of male children. For these investigators, the data produced conclusions that disputed glib assertions of women's supremacy in the domestic domain. Wives do not have a monopoly of power; they share it equally with their husbands.

In Mendez and Jocano's work (1974), husband and wife emerge as "coequal," their roles situationally defined as dominant or docile depending on the context which determines the "specificity or generality of role performance" (p. 272). To illustrate, they point out that the father might be authoritarian in relation to the discipline of children, but the mother can just as easily be construed in the same manner where household chores and money are entailed. They contend that the pattern of authority is neither patriarchal or matriarchal but egalitarian. But they muddy their proposition by declaring, on the one hand, that women have a "high position in the family" and, on the other, that the husband represents the authority who "is not to be bothered . . . with minor problems which are the woman's job" (pp. 47, 270). Overall, they agree with the appraisal that the prevailing standard in family decision making is joint or shared.

Now let us take a look at precisely how egalitarianism or the shared dispensation of authority is practiced in the Filipino family:

Joint decision-making is said to involve the initiation of the problem or issue by either husband, e.g., family business, or wife, e.g., children's discipline, for the two of them to act together. Discussion of possible actions then ensue. After evaluation of the pros and cons of the alternative course of action, some degree of consensus is reached. However, where conflict occurs, the husband's opinion is invariably followed. The wife, however, can take recourse to any of the following to reverse the decision: arguing with her husband, keeping her peace, sulking,
nagging, or disregarding her spouse. Nevertheless, except for the few times when
the couple is at loggerheads, the final decision can still be viewed as the result of
shared responsibility and authority (Illo, 1977, p. 73).

The feebleness of such logic, though certainly apparent, is probably of
less consequence than the writer's determination to press for the desired
conclusion that the last sentence betrays. Without having to evoke femi-
nist rebuttals of the research model — family studies founded on the "per-
sonal resource theory" in the United States in the fifties and sixties,
specifically that of Blood and Wolfe (1960)⁷ — it seems perfectly clear that
egalitarianism is merely a tag that has been foisted upon a set of relations
it really does not fit. The investigators' own confusion is often projected
onto the object of their study. When Mendez and Jocano explain wives'
deference to their husbands as intended "always to give the illusion, if not
the reality, of male dominance," one is tempted to ask: is male dominance
an illusion or is it a reality? After granting that "husbands can and do
impose their will at times," the writers proffer the gift of gender parity
tendered by a masculine sense of fair play: "but they also recognize the
wife's ability to make sound decisions in the interest of the family" (Men-

GENDER EQUALITY VIA "SEPARATE SPHERES"

Recalling Montiel and Hollnsteiner's delimitation of the concept of
status, it should be evident that the work of social scientists in the past
two decades has modified earlier colonial constructions of the Filipino
woman. More specifically, it has exploded the myth of women's superior-
ity or high status in the public domain. But the subscription to the
"separate spheres" perspective has ruled out a synoptic view, one that
would account for all the varied aspects of women's existence. And
there's the rub: for the Filipina becomes "ambiguous" only insofar as the
two spheres of society, the public and private, are disconnected in the
abstraction of scientists' minds. Unlike the traditional concept of sepa-
rate spheres, however, where the wife is believed to maintain authority in
the private domain, in the case of the Filipino family that "authority"
quickly vanishes upon scrutiny. As the aforementioned studies indicate,
the husband holds the right to override the wife's decisions at all levels,
effecting a relationship that is nowhere near equality. Still, it is when this
framework is articulated that the patterns of thought embedded in the
valorization of the woman as morally superior, the wife and mother as

⁷The most vigorous challenges to the approach that this book exemplifies include the
queen of the home, as household manager, etc., finally come to the fore. In similar fashion, the allocation by gender of complementary tasks presumed to be biologically linked, the collapsing of the wife’s treasurer function with possession of power, the precaution that development programs avoid stirring tranquil marital waters—all of these reflect alignment with the philosophy of the separate spheres.

Premised on the belief that equality is possible in a hierarchical society, the notion of separate spheres dovetails neatly with functionalism, the bedrock of mainstream social science in the Philippines. In fact, no critique of the prevailing perspectives on women would make any sense without taking full account of, as it were, the state of the art. Makil and Hunt (1981), evaluating the impact of martial law on the profession, report with curious detachment that research and publication activity actually increased after the advent of martial law. While their abstention from penetrating the political beliefs and ideological values indissociably bound up with a functionalist orientation is to be expected, the reasons they give for the compatibility between social science as it has been practiced and a dictatorial regime are quite to the point. One major element is the reliance on quantitative methodology which coincided perfectly with the requirements of the regime’s technocratic think tank. Further, the “values” orientation of research spearheaded by Frank Lynch, Mary Hollnsteiner, and associates at the Institute of Philippine Culture was seized by military intelligence and adapted with no trouble to their own ends. During the period of martial law (1972–1986), many professionals from the physical, more “objective” sciences, if you will, were arrested and taken prisoner by the Marcos regime, but none from the social sciences. Given this friendly alliance, one can understand or even expect the hesitation, refusal, or downright inability of mainstream social scientists to countenance historical and social realities in the Philippines.

8A close parallel to gender arrangements in the Philippines can be found in the machismo/marianismo cults of Latin America. See, for example, separate essays by Jaquette and Stevens in Pescatello (1973). In the United States, Cott (1977) contends that during the 19th century the sexual oppression of Victorian women allowed them access to the public world as society’s moral guardians.

9Hunt, a U.S. sociology professor at Western Michigan University, is called “father to Philippine sociology”; at the time of their essay’s publication, Makil was director of the Institute of Philippine Culture.

10Progressive social scientists have criticized the way in which this influential group, privileging values or cultural practices removed from the axis of social and political structures, have obscured the real problems in Philippine society, and function as academic servitors for imperialism. This is not an irresponsible accusation given that, as Makil and Hunt acknowledge, funding for research comes from the United States channelled through Philippine government agencies (David, 1982; Samson, 1980).
LIMITS OF FUNCTIONALISM

These fears aside, however, it is the inherent limitations of the functionalist approach itself, with its crude empiricism, that account for its failure to illuminate the woman question in the Philippines. The underlying principle of homeostasis implanted in the concepts endorsed by empiricists causes them to turn their backs on the disturbing presence of conflict implicit in the politics of gender. Thus handicapped, they are unable to deal with the disadvantaged position of women when its obfuscation becomes impossible to ignore.

That studies so far have totally escaped the influence of feminism is an understatement. It is the absence of feminist theorizing that has blinded researchers to the gross asymmetry of the sexual division of labor. So blinded, they can only find there the phenomenon of role differentiation and its cognates—egalitarianism, consensus, complementarity, shared tasks—all establishing residence in the "separate sphere" of the household. As a result, the debate over whether or not the pursekeeper role imbues the wife with power is made to hinge on the size of the purse, to the neglect of the familial ideology that obliterates the woman's interest and conflates it with that of her family.

The belief in the organic unity of the family limits the usefulness of research quantifying home production and market production, even as the delineation of these categories of work has done nothing to unveil the inextricable links between the private and the public domains. In this context, women can be exhorted to take on multiple roles by way of enhancing their "equal partnership with men in progress and development." At the same time, these diverse roles abet culturally induced desires to preserve traditional ideals of femininity and domesticity.

11One sociologist connected with the Institute of Philippine Culture (Eviota, 1986) has published a piece that is decidedly Marxist in orientation. Struggling with great difficulty to cut free from a narrow productivism and to articulate a feminist framework, she nevertheless ultimately succumbs to the tendency to fix the blame for women's subordination on the capitalist process.

The beginning of an efflorescence of feminist ideas since 1984 has, of course, generated interesting work by progressive women that lies distinctly outside the margins of what has been critiqued here. The most significant to date is a pamphlet series (an alternative Philippine report to the 1985 Nairobi conference) produced by the Philippine Women's Research Collective.

12Studies of "tipping up," a similar practice among the working class in England, make clear that husbands receive pocket money while the remaining funds over which wives are supposed to exercise control are actually earmarked for household expenses (Barrett & McIntosh, 1982). For further explication of this practice and the analysis that family members' interests may not always be coalesced, see Oren (1973).
WOMEN-IN-DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE: A CRITIQUE

To pronounce the absence of a feminist paradigm does not, however, annul the women-in-development approach in the studies reviewed, for it is this that has focalized practical, day-to-day matters for which women are responsible by social fiat. A perfunctory survey of research titles since the declaration of the UN Decade for Women attests to the pervasiveness of this theme and its concomitant slogans. A major influence on women-in-development specialists is the work of Boserup (1970). Marxist feminists have criticized the liberalism of Boserup that presides over the bulk of women-in-development literature, charging that although the main thrust is to ameliorate women's lives, it assumes gender inequality to be amenable to repair through education, the provision of jobs, and changes in attitudes.

Ideologically complicit with functionalism, the contribution of women-in-development theory has been to foreground issues of concern to women and to tap the latter as active agents (“equal partners with men”) in the process of “modernization.” A noble goal, indeed, were one to empty out knowledge of the harsh destiny “development” has laid in store for large numbers of Filipino women. While social scientists have, through the use of certain conceptual frameworks, been able to stand at a remove from the vexing problems confronting ordinary women and to shy away from questions of political struggle, this has not been so for government workers. It is they whose job it is to finally execute the cruel hoax.

As an income-generating project (the mainstay of women in development), the Bureau of Women and Minors taught prostitutes the craft of stringing rosary beads for the Pope's 1981 visit, to the accompaniment of a lecture on morals and the financial reward of P2 for eight hours' work (Azarcon-de la Cruz, 1985). Needless to say, this is not a project researchers write about.

Deconstructing Boserup's thesis through a Marxist feminist analysis, Beneria and Sen (1981) point to its hesitation to move beyond the narrow conclusions evolving from empirical data toward a theoretical coherence. In fundamental agreement with the separate spheres philosophy, Boserup's argument suffers from the same deficiencies. She cannot, for example, explain class as anything more than a static category separating people. Nor does she consider how gender might intersect with class to devaluate women. For Beneria and Sen, Boserup's refusal of any real engagement with issues that might expose inequality as a structural feature of capitalism places her in league with international agencies and

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13It is ironic that in this respect the instrumentalism of Philippine government policymakers coincides with that of the revolutionary movement in spite of their dramatically opposed visions of the good society.
their funding goals. The preface of any study on women in the Philippines acknowledging its sponsoring organizations should testify to this. Moreover, Boserup makes no attempt to connect production (the public sphere) into which she would wish to see women integrated, and reproduction (the private sphere) whose part in the construction of gendered subjectivity and female oppression she leaves untouched.

In view of the omission of the central role played by social relations in the household, one is hard put to find the slightest intimation of feminism in the agenda for women in development. Were liberal feminism integral to the framing device used in dissecting the status of women in the Philippines, the outcome would have been drastically different, for a disruptive element would have been introduced.\(^{14}\) Recall, as an example, the passage explaining how "joint" or "egalitarian" decisions are made. One cannot fail to note that the writer's naive adherence to the sociological instruments of role theory and role differentiation is reflected in her total innocence of telltale clues of male domination that a liberal feminist would immediately espy with dismay.

**CONCLUSION**

To conclude, social science research has appropriated the social construction of the Filipino woman formerly assumed by random commentators whose observations, born from mythical lore, inevitably inscribed colonial ideology. While the examination of gender roles and expectations has not unmasked the power structure within the family nor revealed gender differences to be variable, dynamic, and subject to change, the empirical method, however, has eliminated some of the more idiosyncratic qualities of previous discourse on women. Under the aegis of women in development, social researchers have demystified women's status in the public domain and jettisoned the dog-eared fiction of a matriarchy. But an understanding of the family's position within society remains obscured and along with it, women's domestic subservience.

**REFERENCES**


\(^{14}\)Bandarage (1984) specifically names liberal feminism as the fulcrum of women in development. Beneria and Sen (1982) write that "a feminist agenda has often been rather superficially added to economic development projects" (p. 157). Apropos of my argument is the distinction Omvedt (1978) makes between "women's equality movements" and "women's liberation movements," where the former utilize and the latter call into question the sexual division of labor within national struggles. The first supports a women's struggle, the other a feminist one.


The Social Construction of the Filipino Woman


**ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS**

Cet examen critique des représentations des femmes philippines dans la recherche en sciences sociales a pour but de mettre en lumière les préconceptions idéologiques et théoriques qui entravent un portrait exact de la position subordonnée de la femme. Il débute en montrant comment la notion idéologue qui proclame la supériorité de la femme, idée formulée à nouveau avec des raisons appropriées dans le discours colonial, est gravée dans la conscience populaire et s'est montrée résistante à tout changement. Par exemple, le jugement conventionnel voit dans le fait que la femme au foyer contrôle le budget et les affaires du ménage une caractéristique de la matriarchie. En examinant les recherches empiriques les plus significatives, en particulier celles dans la catégorie "femmes dans le développement," cette étude constate une légère déviation de cette perspective. Face à la réalité d'une pauvreté généralisée et de la position des femmes en bas de l'échelle professionnelle, les chercheurs en sciences sociales ont été forçés de reconnaître l'inégalité des femmes dans le domaine public. En tournant leur attention sur le domaine privé les chercheurs établissent l'existence d'une division rigide du travail selon les sexes au sein de la famille. Cette constatation amène au placement de la notion de matriarchie. Nais faute d'adopter une perspective féministe, les chercheurs oublient de s'interroger sur les relations de pouvoir dans la division du travail au sein du ménage. Ils ne réussissent pas à démontrer le rôle sanctifié de la maternité et le valorisation correspondante de la femme en tant qu'être moralement supérieur. C'est ainsi que les études qui se concentrent sur la manière dont les décisions sont prises ont simplement substitué l'égalitarisme à la dominance de la femme et ont maintenu l'idée de la complémentarité des sexes basée sur la philosophie des "sphères séparées." (author-supplied abstract)

Esta reseña crítica de las representaciones de las mujeres filipinas en la investigación dentro de las ciencias sociales, alumbran las conjeturas ideológicas y teóricas que obstaculizan una descripción precisa del estado subordinado de las mujeres.
The Social Construction of the Filipino Woman

Comienza con una exposición sobre cómo el saber popular autóctono, vocero de la superioridad de las mujeres, reconstruido con la racionalización apropiada para el habla colonial, está gravado en la conciencia popular y ha resultado resistente a alteraciones. La visión convencional, por ejemplo, ve a la función de la mujer como aquella que realiza la función del manejo del dinero junto con la de administradora de la familia, presentando así evidencia de matriarcado. Examinando los estudios empíricos más significativos, particularmente aquellos dentro de la categoría de mujeres en desarrollo, el ensayo observa una separación leve de esta perspectiva. Confrontadas con una realidad de pobreza extensiva y con la ubicación de las mujeres en el sitio más bajo de la estructura ocupacional, los científicos sociales han tenido que reconocer la carencia de igualdad para la mujer en la esfera pública. Mirando hacia la esfera privada, los investigadores documentan la existencia de una división del trabajo rígida en el núcleo familiar entre los géneros. Este descubrimiento resulta en la dislocación de la noción de matriarcado. Pero, sin la ayuda de estructuras feministas, los investigadores no alcanzan a hacer preguntas sobre el poder de las relaciones enquistadas en las tareas de los géneros dentro de la familia. Fracasan al no desenmascarar el papel santificado de la maternidad y en la acompañante valorización de las mujeres como moralmente superiores. En cambio, los estudios que se concentran en la toma de decisiones han sustituido simplemente la doctrina de la igualdad por la del predominio de las mujeres y han sostenido la idea de que los géneros son complementarios, basada en la filosofía de "esferas separadas." (author-supplied abstract)