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## Long Live Matriarchy

Much of today's world functions under a patriarchal structure with a few exceptions, such as the Mosuo in China and the Iroquois in North America. Upon closer examination, though, the legacy of matriarchy continues to influence society at both the local and national levels. This paper will analyze the vestiges of matriarchy found in my family, culture, religion, and American society at large and discuss the similarities and differences in each of these contexts.

In his book *Understanding Filipino Values*, Tomas Andres emphasizes kinship as the underlying foundation of the Filipino culture at the social, economic, and political levels (21). However, unlike in a pure matriarchy, the Filipino's lineage is traced through the paternal line and marriage is practiced. There are typically three levels in the Filipino family: the grandparents, parents, and children. The grandparents are at the top, and they function as consultants whose advice are sought and bear much weight when it comes to important matters. The father is the head of the family while the mother is the governor. According to Andres, "...it is the mother that reigns in the home, she is the educator, the financial officer, the laundry woman and the cook" (22). She is similar to the Dabu, as explained in Heide Goettner-Abendroth's book *Societies of Peace*: "Dabu is responsible for putting food on the table... The male members of the family will give all their earnings to Dabu..." (249). The Filipino mother is also like the Iroquois women, who, as Peggy Sanday states in *Female Power and Male Dominance*, "...managed the households" (28).

Because the Filipino social structure is centered on kinship, there is a stronger emphasis on the group rather than the individual, which is understood as *pakikisama*. In *Making Filipino Values Work for You*, Tomas Andres defines *pakikisama* as the "...Filipino natural instinct of uniting one's will with the wills of others in a...peer group for the sense of camaraderie" (42). When properly directed, it leads to equal treatment of and respect for others and vice versa. It makes the Filipino *makatao*, which means showing concern for others and thinking together to decide the best course of action for the group in a particular situation. Like the Native North Americans, Filipinos believe it is shameful if one does not share or cannot relate or get along well with others. Another component of *makatao* is sharing one's talent, time, and goods to less fortunate members of the community. Filipinos are like the *Syilx*, who, as described in Genevieve Vaughan's book *Women and the Gift Economy*, share and distribute their goods among their members (48). The members in a Filipino family are supportive of each other and will extend help to whoever is in need. For example, my uncle gave one of his older cars for free to my brother because he needed it to go to school. However, the concept of *utang na loob* sets the Filipinos apart from cultures that are purely matriarchal. Whenever someone gives a service or does a favor for another, the receiver considers himself or herself "indebted" and desires to return back what he or she owes to the giver, whether it be through service or by money, in order to avoid being branded as "ungrateful." In a pure matriarchy, Goettner-Abendroth states that the wealthy clans give away their riches as unconditional gifts to neighbors and expect nothing in return (21). Thus, the receivers accept these gifts graciously without worrying about paying them back.

Fiestas are significant in the Filipino culture, similar to the winter dances of the *Syilx*. Almost anything, big or small, can be a cause for celebration. The fiesta has an immeasurable social value because it is an occasion in which families hold reunions and is a time to show appreciation for favors done and received. A Filipino value related to the fiesta

is Filipino hospitality. Everyone is invited to the celebration, and Filipinos would even open their doors to a complete stranger so no one would be left out. The host makes sure that his or her guests are well provided for by preparing the best food for them and giving up his or her bed for their comfort's sake. In the spirit of pakikisama, Filipinos share whatever they are and whatever they have. However, whereas the winter dance of the Syilx is a big give-away of goods, the Filipino fiesta is an opportunity to pay back debts, not necessarily outright payables, but rather "debts of honor."

Most Filipinos are Catholic, and the biggest fiesta they celebrate is in honor of Mary, Queen of May. They have a strong devotion to her and seek her intercession by prayer, especially through the rosary. She is the mediator between the faithful and Jesus and is the guide who helps believers become closer to God. However, unlike Gan mu and Shinami in the Mosuo culture, Mary is not viewed as a Goddess herself and is not worshipped. Rather, she is a human free of original sin, the Mother of God, and the spiritual mother to all who believe in her.

There are several teachings in Christianity that run parallel to the values in a pure matriarchy. For example, Paul urges Christians to "...agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose" (The New American Bible, 1 Cor. 1:10). This is similar to the Iroquois' belief in unity and consensus. Regarding giving, Jesus said, "Give and gifts will be given to you; ...For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you" (The New American Bible, Lk. 6:38). Armstrong echoes this sentiment: "...when we give freely without asking for anything back...you receive back the equivalent of four times whatever it is that you gave" (48).

However, the major difference between Christianity and matriarchal spirituality, such as that of the Mosuo, is that Christians view God as male and believe that He alone is divine.

Some vestiges of matriarchy are evident in American society, like on the political level. The U.S. constitution was in fact partly modeled after the Iroquoian Constitution. Goettner-Abendroth highlights common key points such as the practice of checks and balances, "...power deriving from the will of the governed, freedom of speech and conscience, the interaction at federal and state levels, and impeachment of officials..." (65). However, it is the Iroquoian Constitution that places a high value on women and their important roles in leading the nation. In the United States, it is the president, who has been male since the country's founding, who assumes these women's roles, such as declaring or ending war. Furthermore, he is not chosen by women but rather indirectly voted for by the general public and directly by the state electors.

America values diversity and equal opportunities for all, and its citizens can exercise freedom of speech, religion, and expression. Similarly, the Syilx emphasize the importance of respecting and trying to incorporate each other's diversity when they formulate a solution to a problem or settle an issue; it is a peaceful dialogue. In America, it is more of a debate, which can become heated and even escalate to violence, as evidenced in the civil rights movement of the 1960s and current personal issues, such as abortion and same-sex marriage.

Although my family, culture, religion, and American society at large are clearly patriarchal, vestiges of matriarchy are present. I have come to the understanding that patriarchy depends on matriarchy to function, like the young son or daughter who relies on the mother for love, security, and nourishment. Patriarchy cannot completely let go of its ties to matriarchy because the values of matriarchy – such as nurture, care, and collaboration – ensure peace and harmony among humans and between the human race and the Earth, the way it is supposed to be.

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