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Aspects of Malay Society: Malay Kinship and Marriage in Singapore

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home; indeed any person to whom is given the responsibility to instruct and to lead the young. After all, the Holy Ghost meant all teachers when He inspired the evangelist to write: "...they that instruct many unto justice shall shine as stars for all eternity."

TRINIDAD DE GRANO

ASPECTS OF MALAY SOCIETY

MALAY KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE IN SINGAPORE. (London School of Economics, Monographs on Social Anthropology, No. 21.) By Judith Djamour. London: The Athlone Press, 1959. 151p.

Social scientists interested in the Philippines and South East Asia will welcome Judith Djamour's excellent study of *Malay Kinship and Marriage in Singapore*. The book, with a companion volume entitled *Chinese Family and Marriage in Singapore*, authored by her husband, Maurice Freedman, offers the historian, the social anthropologist and the economist a significant new body of data and a variety of new insights into the Malay and Nanyang Chinese communities of South East Asia. The fact that the Malay society studied in the book under review has close ethnocultural links with those in most Philippine lowland areas, and particularly close links with the several Muslim societies in Mindanao and Sulu, also provides a pregnant source of provocative comparisons and contrasts.

The study of Dr. Djamour concentrated on two Malay communities in Singapore, one a small fishing community on the south-west coast, and the other an urbanized group of Malays within the town proper. The people in the fishing village, an isolated social unit of just over two hundred inhabitants, were "local Malays", i.e. most of them were native-born in the fishing community itself and had roots going back several generations. Practically all were fishermen or members of fishermen's households. The Malays in the urban area were a mixture of "local Malays" and immigrant Indonesians, the latter being more numerous.

The population in the village was exclusively Malay, with the exception of one Chinese shopkeeper and four Malabari Muslims. In the urban area on the other hand the Malay population was mixed with both Chinese and Indian families living in quarters built by the Singapore Government. Unlike the Malay village, whose occupational pattern was exclusively fishing, this urban population had a wide range of occupations including labourers, semi-skilled workers, a few skilled workers, office messengers and junior clerks.

Singapore Malays, in common with Filipinos and most Malayo-Polynesian societies, have a loosely structured bilateral kinship system in which, apart from unmarried full siblings, any two individuals have a different range of kindred. Like their Filipino counterparts, Singapore Malay society is kincentric. An individual Malay does not seek and usually does not expect to find great intimacy outside his kindred. When intimacy between Singapore Malays does develop outside the kin group, kinship terms are invariably utilized to express such a relationship. The substance, but not the form, is much the same as that provided by the ritualistic kin status of "compadres" in the Christian Philippines.

While Dr. Djamour's study canvasses numerous interesting facets of Malay social and cultural life, her primary interest was in the instability of Muslim Malay marriages and the relationship between such instability and the lack of effective political, community, tribal, clan or lineage organizations. An attempt was made to determine whether the lack of formal corporate groupings in such a bilateral kinship society led to the establishment of types of economic and social solidarity patterns of an informal nature between a person and his close kinsman. Djamour was also interested in testing the hypothesis that societies with unilateral descent have more stable marriage patterns than societies with bilateral descent.

The conclusions of Djamour's study were that dependence on kincentric groupings was near universal, but that appeals to kinsmen were made on a person-to-person basis rather than to any clearly definable kin grouping or sub-grouping. Carl Lande's pioneer work in studying the basis of political organization in contemporary Philippine politics and Father Frank Lynch's field studies in the Bicol, it is interesting to note, both suggested similar characteristics in the social and political organization of lowland Filipino society.

Djamour also found her test hypothesis concerning marriage stability and unilateral descent untenable after comparing a number of Muslim unilateral and bilateral societies. She likewise rejected a secondary hypothesis suggesting Islam, with its system of laws and morals which allow ease as well as frequency of divorce, as the key, after a study of the extremely wide variations of divorce frequency rates within the Muslim world. Her conclusion was that it was difficult to make any valid generalizations on the relationship of kinship structure and marriage stability.

The broader observations Djamour makes concerning differences in cultural values, organizational capacities, aspiration levels and attitudes between Singapore Malays and Singapore Nanyang Chinese, will be of particular interest to econocologists.

Singapore Chinese society is described as one in which the acquisition of wealth is considered to be one of the most important aims in

life and almost an end in itself. The Singapore Malay society, on the other hand, is described as a society attaching greatest importance to "easy and careful living", and a society in which aspiration levels rarely extend beyond a roof overhead, sufficient food to eat, and a new suit of clothes for Hari Raya.

The Djamour study provides numerous examples of high "values" in Malay society which are not susceptible of conventional economic description and analysis, values for which monetary prices are singularly inappropriate. The "value" of emotional contentment, the "value" of having a large number of kinsmen with mutually recognized relationships (even when no practical material benefits are involved and possible disadvantages are recognized), the "value" placed by a woman on living in close proximity to her mother even after marriage, are a few examples cited.

Since such non-"market price"-oriented values play a unique and critical role in Malay life, it is obviously necessary to recognize and understand these socio-ecological dimensions of the situation to adequately understand the economizing ("economizing" defined as the allocation of scarce values) process in such a society.

Djamour makes a number of observations concerning corporate organizations which are likewise of relevance to the economic structure and economic responsibilities of the society. She notes that in a bilateral society such as that of the Singapore Malays, the lack of a definable large kin group except in reference to *ego* or to a group of unmarried siblings, means that all individual Malays belong to several ego-centered groups of kin. Despite the critical importance of kincentric ties, few traditions for kin-corporate action of any type can be found, since practically no one shares common kindred. Dr. Djamour found this lack of common sharing of kindred resulted in non-enduring business partnerships or corporate activities on the one hand, and on the other, the limitations of one's relationships largely within the kincentric group precluding the development of inter-kin corporate activity. In her particular field study, Djamour observed that Malays appear to lack a capacity to own jointly even such small capital items as fishing nets, and that the few business partnerships that have been created in the Malay groups she studied had collapsed within a short period of time.

Both by virtue of the subject matter and by virtue of the competence with which such subject matter is handled, Judith Djamour's *Malay Kinship and Marriage in Singapore* deserves to be widely read by scholars who are interested in the Philippines and its place in South East Asia. This reviewer was particularly impressed with the wide-ranging similarities between Singapore Malay society and much of the lowland Christian society of the Philippines. Fortunately, one

can now look forward to numerous similar studies on Philippine and other South East Asian areas as the fruit of the wide-ranging recent anthropological field work reaches print.

T. R. McHALE

SQUATTERS

THE WORLD IS AN APPLE AND OTHER PRIZE PLAYS. By Alberto S. Florentino. Manila: Philippine Cultural Publishers. 1959. 107p.

I have never met Mr. Florentino. But I have a letter from him, dated 12 March 1960, and I think he will not object if I take the liberty of quoting two paragraphs from it:

"I know I shouldn't be writing someone who is about to make an appraisal of my plays, but I need the help of a competent, unbiased critic who can clarify for the public and *for me* whether the plays I have written are (to quote someone) 'immoral per se'; whether my endings 'condone evil'; and whether or not they 'mention the name of God in vain'. Or whether (to quote some one else) 'they are a plea for justice' or even 'a prayer to God' (*Oli Impan*).

"I myself cannot say whether the charges of immorality and blasphemy are correct or not; I am too much involved to do that. All I can say is I never intended to write immoral, blasphemous plays. Now, as to whether, despite my good intentions, what came out were such kinds of plays, I cannot tell. It would take someone outside of me to find out and say so... I shall wait for your review and I shall hope you shall touch on these points."

That poses the question quite clearly and squarely, and I am glad that Mr. Florentino himself has posed it. I shall try to answer the question with equal frankness and lucidity, with the very important proviso, however, that it should be clearly understood that anything I say is my own private, personal opinion and carries no particular weight. What I say here or elsewhere on this or on any other subject is offered *salvo meliori judicio* — with deference to the judgment of others far more competent than I.

With this premised, let us take a look at Mr. Florentino's plays.

I first noticed Florentino's work when reviewing Mrs. Jean Edades' *More Short Plays of the Philippines*. That review, which appeared in these pages in June 1958, contains the following statement: "Two plays in this collection seem especially powerful: 'The World is an Apple' and 'Cadaver,' both by Alberto S. Florentino, who, at the time