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Marriage and the Ilocano Oldtimer

RENE D. SOMERA

The lyrics of a very popular Ilocano folksong say that an old man's love is the bitterest of all loves. Rather than glorify the resplendence of young love as the title "Ti Ayat ti Maysa nga Ubing" (The Love of Young One) would suggest, the folksong says that an old man's affection is "repugnantly acrid."

Ti ayat ti maysa nga ubing
Nasamsam-it ngem hasmin
Kasla sabong a pagukrad
Iti bulan ti Abril

(The love of a young one
Is sweeter than jasmine
Like a blooming flower
In the month of April)

Ti ayat ti maysa nga lakay
Aglalo no agkabaw
Napait, napait
Napait a makasugkar

(An old man's affection
Especially when senile
Bitter, bitter, yes
Repugnantly acrid, it is)

Anansata o lelo
Agsapul ka tay balo
Kapadpada ta uban mo
Ken dayta tuppul mo

(My dear grandpa, oh
Find yourself a widow
Who has white hair
And missing teeth, too)

Baybay-am nga panunoten
Ti ayat ti maysa nga ubing
Aglalo, aglalo
No adda akin-aywanen

(Do not yearn any longer
For the affection of a maiden
Particularly when
She already has a lover)¹

This article was a paper presented at the First National Philippine Studies Conference, at the Philippine Social Science Center (PSSC), Diliman, Quezon City, 11-13 February 1985.

1. My own mother, Consolacion D. Somera, 60, sang the folksong for me while I transcribed it.

Many an Ilocano would interpret the "lakay" (an old man) in the folksong as a direct reference to the Ilocano *landing*. This term, derived from the English verb "to land," is an Ilocanized English word used to mean *oldtimers* coming from Hawaii or Mainland US, who have finally landed, as Ilocanos would put it, in their native hometowns. It must be clarified at the outset that May-December nuptials in the Ilocos do not necessarily involve *landings* alone.² With the passage of years, Ilocanos have come to regard a landing's marriage proposal to any maiden in the community, whether teenaged or not-teenaged, as a May-December relationship. With this broad definition, there are several variations of such a relationship: the oldtimer-retiree who comes home, marries, and settles in the town itself; another who comes home, courts a girl, goes back, then sends for her; or the landing who woos a girl, wins her and both of them go back together, their marriage either solemnized here or abroad.

The social phenomenon of May-December marriages in Ilocos is rooted in the Hawaii immigration history of male Ilocanos. As early as 1906, young Ilocano men were recruited by the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association (better known as the HSPA) to work as indentured laborers in the plantations of Hawaii.³ Although some of these immigrants were married, it was HSPA's precondition initially that the families, or women were to be left behind. Thus, virtually without women, the immigrants were a lonely lot. When some of these "lonely men" came back to their towns or barrios for brief visits, local girls were provided rightly or wrongly, a glimpse of these men's new kind of lifestyle.⁴ To many a

2. At least for this paper, a May-December relationship refers to an old man's involvement with a younger woman, not an older woman's affair with a young man. In Ilocos, the latter is not as common as the former. I have preferred to use the uniquely-Ilocano term *landing* rather than *oldtimer*.

3. For an account of the recruitment history of the very first batch of Ilocano immigrants to Hawaii, see Ruben Alcantara's essay, "1906: The First Sakada" in Juan Dionisio, ed. *The Filipinos in Hawaii: The First 75 Years*, (Honolulu: Hawaii Filipino News Specialty Publications, 1981). Historical records reveal that the Ilocos area (primarily Ilocos Sur and Ilocos Norte) was the chief source of Hawaii laborers during the early years. The early Ilocano immigrants, in the process of acculturation, faced various psycho-social problems. For a well-documented account of these issues, see "Problems of Accommodating to Life in America, 1920-1940," Chap. 4, pp. 58-78, in Brett Melendy's *Asians in America: Filipinos, Koreans and Indians* (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1977). Likewise, see "Filipino Economic and Social Adjustments since World War II," Chap. 7, pp. 95-107.

4. Bruno Lasker, *Filipino Immigration to Continental United States and to Hawaii* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), p. 88. Reprinted by Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969).

dreamy-eyed, young lass, a landing from Hawaii was indeed a "good catch" for marriage. Little did these girls know about these immigrants' real working conditions in their places of employment.

The government's *Balikbayan* program (LOI 105) launched in 1973 was a "tourism package" meant to attract Filipinos living abroad to come home even for a brief sentimental visit to the country.⁵ Many Ilocano landings, particularly those who had acquired US citizenship, took this opportunity to come home, for either temporary or permanent settlement in their native towns or barrios. Although some of them did come primarily to visit friends or families, many of them purposely came to look for prospective brides.

By focusing on a specific Ilocos parish, this article seeks to explore the social content of the May-December marriages in the light of Ilocano values and setting.⁶

CONTEXT OF AN ILOCOS PARISH

The town of Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur is a town of small farmers and fishermen. With 33 barangays and a present-day population of approximately 38,000, it attracts its own share of local tourists because of its waterfall called Pinsal. Recently renovated by the Historical Commission, the town's church is also another source of pride for every native resident.

Built atop a hill overlooking the town hall and the plaza, the Catholic Assumption Parish Church in the heart of Sta. Maria is a popular choice for wedding ceremonies. Given the church's ideal locale and ancient vintage (inaugurated 1769), it draws prospective couples from adjacent towns, like Narvacan, Burgos and San Esteban, opting to "tie the knot" at the historic church. Here at Sta. Maria, as the bulky *Book of Marriages* kept on the shelves of the parish cabinet would attest, not a few May-December marriages

5. The program has been on for more than a decade now. See *Daily Express*, 1 September 1983. In the same report, Director Pedro G. Tuason of the Bureau of Tourism Promotions revealed that as of April 1983, the registered number of *Balikbayan* arrivals since September 1973 was 1,053,700.

6. Initial data-gathering for this paper occurred on three weekends (13, 20 and 27 August 1983) when I took several trips to Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur for the purpose of re-establishing contact with previous informants. During the semestral breaks of 1979, 1980 and 1981, I worked in the same area on general research about Ilocano immigrants to Hawaii. I updated all pertinent data during the December 1984 Christmas break.

have been celebrated and solemnized by a succession of parish priests all through the years.⁷

Of the five volumes kept in the wooden cabinet of the spacious parish anteroom-library, two volumes were actually used for this article. These two volumes, Books 9 and 10, listed 25 years of church marriages at the Catholic Assumption Parish Church in Sta. Maria. Book 9, which was completely filled up, covered September 1958 to April 1981, while Book 10, only partially filled up, covered May 1981 to April 1983.

Significantly, it must be mentioned that the two chosen books carried English entries, unlike the three earlier volumes, bearing Spanish entries in prose.⁸ These included Book 6, covering 1884 to 1898; Book 7, 1898 to 1923; and Book 8, 1924 to 1958.

The information recorded in Books 9 and 10 revealed data like names of couples, date of marriage, address, age, officiating priest and sponsors. Of these, the age factor was the key indicator in the process of elimination and selection. For instance, Book 9 listed the registration of a couple, Lorenzo Castillo, sixty-five years old, and Nenita Garcia, nineteen years old, with their marriage solemnized by Rev. Teodorico Rivera on 28 November 1975. Surely this was a May-December marriage, with forty-six years age difference between them.

Thus, the basic data gathered from the church records served as valuable source for primary informants — the married couples — or if this proved difficult, their marriage sponsors, as secondary informants. In short, a systematic gathering of data was made possible through the completed list of May-December couples as carefully culled and sifted from the available church records. True, there was some difficulty in tracing the couples, either because they had left town or had permanently settled abroad; this limitation, however, was partly compensated by the information given

7. For the period covering 1958-83, the following parish priests have served at the Sta. Maria Assumption Parish Church, in the ff. order: Reverend Fathers Avelino Sipin, Joaquin Lontoc, Benjamin Paredes, Digno Narcelles, D.B. Valdez, Crispin Realubin, Jesus Eisma, Teodorico Rivera, Angel Pasibi, Raymundo Gracia, M.A. Estonilo, Victorio Rabaca and Ven Mata.

8. Found in Book 8, page 249, a sample Spanish text, written in the parish priest's own handwriting, reads as follows: "En 6 de Enero de 1958 case y vele en esta Iglesia de mi cargo a Bonifacio Somera soltero de 29 años de edad hijo de Dionisio Somera y Eusebia Soria con Magdalena Guzman soltera de 23 años de edad hija de Calixto Guzman y Valentina Tabonillo. Fueron testigos Santiago Racadio y Eveng Rabot. Dispensadas tres proclamas."

by their neighbors, relatives or friends, who knew them earlier. Above all, the parish priest was not only a valuable informant, but also made the initial contacts with prospective informants.

Among the couples registered in Book 9, sixty-eight May-December pairs were culled with a foreign address (either Hawaii or US Mainland), while Book 10, because of its very limited period, yielded only two such marriages. The foreign address criterion, in effect, became the basis for a final selection of prospective respondents, although initially it could not be ascertained if the couples chosen took permanent residence in the town soon after the marriage or immediately packed their bags and left town. This was only confirmed later in the field, when couples or their sponsors, relatives or neighbors, as the case may be, were sought out for a possible interview.⁹

The following table summarizes the data¹⁰ culled from the two volumes, Books 9 and 10:

Period	No. of May-December Marriages Solemnized at the Church	Percent
1958-61	17	24.3
1962-65	11	15.7
1966-71	7	10.0
1972-75	17	24.3
1976-79	14	20.0
1980-83	4	5.7
TOTAL	70	100.0

As the above table indicates, a marked increase (N=17) in the number of May-December marriages is seen during the 1972-75 period. 1973 was the year when the government's *Balikbayan* pro-

9. For the field interview phase, the following informants supplied valuable information, as well as insights: Rev. Ven Mata, 53, parish priest of Sta. Maria; Aurelio Darang, 54, former parish secretary, now a schoolteacher; Raymunda Reboldela, 53, schoolteacher; Consolacion Somera, 60, schoolteacher; Felicitas Ysmael, 58, schoolteacher; Caridad Felicitas, 49, schoolteacher; Teresita Lizardo, 52, schoolteacher; and eleven unidentified informants who were either neighbors, acquaintances or relatives of the persons directly involved. Except for those primary informants identified in the text, the others (including five young brides) requested anonymity.

10. For a complete listing of the May-December couples included herein, please refer to the Appendix.

gram was initially implemented. Marriages solemnized at the church during this period compare with the number of such nuptials for the period 1958-61 (N=17), when the ₱2 to \$1 currency exchange ratio led many oldtimers to choose to retire in the Philippines. The oldtimer-retiree knew well that his Social Security pension would, in the Philippines, make him wealthy; whereas, if he opted to remain in Hawaii, his pension would just be enough to make ends meet. The turbulent years of the mid-sixties and the early seventies, on the other hand, could have had their impact too on these oldtimers' decisions to come back home, since for the period 1966-71, only seven such marriages took place at the Sta. Maria church. The most dramatic dip, however, is seen in the period 1980-83 (N=4), partly attributable perhaps to the unstable political situation currently prevailing in the country.

This "scant harvest," in fact, drew a comment from Rev. Ven Mata, the present parish priest of Sta. Maria, to the effect that such a marriage arrangement "is on the decline since a few years back" (bumasbassit a bumasbassit kadagiti napalabas a tawen).¹¹ Implicit in this remark is, of course, that it was "at its peak sometime in the past" (kaaduna idi), as a former parish secretary, Aurelio Darang, contended. When seen in the light of the above table, both off-hand observations may, in fact, be considered valid.

Yet, how are these figures actually translated into the socio-anthropological dynamics of a May-December marriage?

IMAGE AND SUCCESS

A landing is wont to say "Umapalda ngamin" (They're simply envious) when ugly rumors are rife in the community about his impending marriage to a younger woman. The oldtimer, reserves the sole right to choose his life partner, and not to be dictated to by others. In any case, he also knows that anyone who is successful is always envied; he recognizes "apal" (envy) as natural, since it is a part of the larger orientation closely associated with socio-economic security.¹² In short, he realizes full well that it

11. The reasons cited by Fr. Mata are as follows: the growing education of these young girls, the failure stories about such marriages, and the gradual change of value orientation of people in general, as a result of the growing influence of mass media.

12. F. Landa Jocano, *The Ilocanos, An Ethnography of Family and Community Life in the Ilocos Region* (Diliman: UP Asian Center, 1982), p. 208.

may be his economic status, having just retired with pension benefits, that is the target of envy, not really his decision to marry someone younger.

Marrying a young woman, most importantly, inflates the landing's self-worth. Here is an old man who has wholly devoted his prime to physical labor, who has endured perhaps discrimination, who, in all likelihood, has neglected his emotional needs; all in pursuit of economic betterment. "He is entitled to happiness like anybody else" (*Rumbeng na met ti maragsakan*), Tiburcio Daproza, a seventy-eight year old landing asserts. Which is why, he adds, he married a young bride whom he thinks could make him happy. Thus, more than the social prestige, the sense of psychological fulfillment the landing derives from such an arrangement is perhaps of more importance to him.

On the allegation that "it is only his money that the girl is interested in" (*pirakna la ti kayat ni babai*), the oldtimer would merely retort: "*Kunada la dayta gapu ta awananda, saan a kas kadakami*" (They merely say so since they have nothing, unlike us). This remark could be interpreted in two ways: it refers to his favorable financial status, on the one hand, and the social prestige he will gain out of the marriage (in the eyes of his peers at least), on the other.

Yet, the honor he feels for himself may not be so for his relatives, or for the entire community or barrio for that matter. It may take the form of censure or ostracism instead. To the landing's relatives, such a marriage means being edged out of the inheritance line, should the old man die. To the local young boys, these men are potential "threats" to their courtships.

Within this context, the traditional means of social control in a small community are usually employed. These include the people's avoidance of the pair, public gossip about the relationship and vocal criticism against the impending marriage, in public places especially. These, in turn, generate conflicts between the retiree-landing and his countless relatives. If unresolved, these usually spark a "cold war" or a "no-talk" relationship between the two parties. A common irritant in kinship ties in the Ilocos, particularly felt in rural areas, would be a returning oldtimer's decision to wed a young girl "who is fit to be his granddaughter". (*makunan nga apo na*).

BRIDE AS NURSE

"An old man needs a robust caretaker in his twilight years, so I married" (*Masapul ti lakay ti nasalun-at nga taga-aywan, isu nga nangasawaak*), seventy-eight-year-old Silvino Sagun explains, in an answer to a question about his failing health. "A young girl is a perfect nurse" (*Nalaing nga agtaraken ti ubing*), he adds in all seriousness. Like other returning landings in the barrio who have opted to wed young brides, he has simply brushed off snide remarks and criticism directed at him and his twenty-two-year-old wife. All he cares about, he emphatically declares, is the assurance of "tender, loving care" (*ayat ken dungngo*) from his chosen life partner. He also refuses to admit that age is ever an issue in his marriage. Though his relatives have accused his young wife as an "opportunist," he believes otherwise. "I am the opportunist," he says, "not my innocent wife" (*Siak ti mananggundaway, saan nga ni baketko*).

Such benevolent defense of one's wife by a landing does not happen all the time though. In some cases, the unsuspecting old man finds out for himself what his relatives had, been quick to point out earlier. An informant revealed, for instance, that his uncle (who is the oldtimer) regretted his decision after only three months, when he realized he married a lusty, young woman who "did not even attempt to hide her extra-marital affair from him" (*di na pay inlemmeng ti panangulbod na kenkuana*). Such a realization took its toll on the landing's health, and eventually cost him his life.

FAILURE OR SUCCESS

The following two case histories of May-December marriages, one solemnized in Sta. Maria and the other in Hawaii, illustrate scenarios that arise out of a union between a landing and a younger woman:

Case 1

LIGAYA GARCIA, a "halo-halo" vendor, married a PC soldier at age 18. Fate was however unkind to her, for her first child was still unborn when she received news of her husband's death in the field, barely a year after the nuptial.

As a young widow with a baby daughter to feed, life became unbearably difficult for Ligaya. Her income from her small "halo-halo" stall soon proved insufficient for her child's needs alone. Her sickly mother and younger brothers and sisters became another problem of hers.

At this crucial stage in her life, she suddenly disappeared from Sta. Maria one day. Ligaya's disappearance became obvious when schoolchildren, as well as teachers, of Sta. Maria West Central School, could no longer buy "halo-halo" from her makeshift stall near the school's gate.

In a small town like Sta. Maria, rumors easily spread like wildfire. It was soon public knowledge that Ligaya had eloped with another man from San Esteban, an adjacent town. This man, the story went, provided the necessary finances for her mother's medicines and her child's needs. But Ligaya and "her man" never showed up in the town together.

The months passed and Ligaya would have been forgotten by the schoolchildren had she not suddenly opened her stall one day. As if nothing ever happened, she conducted her business as usual. Teachers of the school were quick to order "halo-halo" from her, if only to gather round her stall and possibly learn about Ligaya's "secret affair." But Ligaya never opened her mouth and the matter rested there.

Barely a month after Ligaya's homecoming, rumormongers of the town had another heyday. This was sparked by an announcement from the parish priest that Ligaya, then 24 years old, was to be married to a *landing* from San Esteban in 3 weeks' time. The wedding was to be solemnized at the town's church. Soon after the church announcement, Ligaya's stall was permanently closed and the schoolchildren never tasted her "halo-halo" again.

ESTEBAN ELIGIO, a 70-year old retired Hawaii plantation laborer, finally decided to come back to San Esteban, his native hometown. Having remained a bachelor all his life while in Hawaii and later, at Stockton, California, he also made up his mind to settle down upon coming home.

The pathetic story of widowed Ligaya reached Esteban's ears, through one of his *kumpares*. But while his relatives cautioned him about Ligaya's "questionable morals," he did not give much credence to their stories. A soft-hearted man, he was easily moved to pity regarding Ligaya's sorry plight. Thus, he resolved to meet Ligaya personally to offer his marriage proposal.

The wedding, held 24 December 1974, was *en grande*, by the town's standards. While the church was indeed filled to the rafters, these were mostly Ligaya's friends, acquaintances and relatives. On the other hand, only a handful of Esteban's relatives came to witness the wedding.

During the church ceremonies, according to stories that circulated after the event, a coffin was being brought into the church's main door as the newly-wed couple was about to go out. The old people who attended the

ceremonies, the same story went, shouted frantically at the couple to go out the church's backdoor. It was too late however and it was a bad omen, everybody said so. The other guests then concluded that the union would not last long. But the optimistic couple only laughed off such remarks directed at them during the sumptuous reception tendered by the old man at Ligaya's spacious frontyard.

Esteban and Ligaya wanted a peaceful married life, away from nagging relatives and rumormongers, so the old man decided they should go back to Stockton. As the old man promised her, Ligaya would later petition for her family and her child, and that problem was soon resolved. After making all the necessary arrangements, Ligaya's childhood dream of "riding an airplane" finally came true.

A few years after, Sta. Maria's rumormongers had another item: Ligaya had left the old man! Former Central School teacher and *balik-bayan* Matilde Bañez narrated the news with much regret, for her own kin, she admitted, was involved with Ligaya this time. According to Matilde's facts, Ligaya ran off with Crispin Bañez and they soon shared a Stockton apartment as a live-in couple.

As for the old man, Matilde continued, he is still nursing a broken heart and has been bedridden since the break-up. It is said that he has expressed his desire to die in his native hometown, San Esteban. Virtually penniless now however, his plane fare is his biggest problem.¹³

Case 2

Still unmarried at age 35, ILUMINADA FORONDA's "single blessedness" was the constant subject of talk among her co-teachers of Sta. Maria West Central School, everytime they had a chance to get together. Iluminada remained unfazed and oblivious of their "teasing," however. She always countered she knew better.

Iluminada's *real* problem, as most of her colleagues saw it, was her elder brother Jaime. She had a number of suitors, true, but Jaime was critical of their "Sunday visits" at their home. Although one or two remained ardent in their courtship, the rest vowed never to come back after a brief encounter with Iluminada's brother.

There was this persistent engineer named Goyo Azurin who pursued Iluminada no end. He would bring her chocolates and flowers even to her classroom, making Iluminada blush in front of her Grade III pupils. She could not discourage him, nor could her brother. Just at the time when

13. The following informants contributed greatly to a re-telling of Ligaya's life story: Caridad Felicitas, Carmen Dolor, and Felicitas Ysmael; all schoolteachers, the first two at Sta. Maria West Central School and the third, at the Ilocos Sur Agricultural College (ISAC), also at Sta. Maria.

Illuminada developed a gradual liking for him, Goyo suddenly lost interest in her, for no apparent reason at all. Broken-hearted Illuminada vowed never to consider marriage ever again, from then on.

Prior to his recruitment to work in a Hawaii sugar plantation before the war, FILEMON DIRECTO was a lowly rig driver in Sta. Maria. When the Hawaii opportunity thus came, he packed his bags and left his calesa to a poorer kin. Like others who went before him, he was hopeful of a brighter life abroad. To be a "pukan cane" (cane-cutter) is better than a rig driver, he reportedly told his friends before he left for Hawaii.

Upon retiring at age 60, Filemon, now called Philip, felt an "undefined craving" to visit Sta. Maria again. Many years had passed since he last saw the town. Besides, he thought it was the ripe time for him, now that he was a US citizen, to finally settle down with a lifetime partner. What better place to seek for a bride than in Sta. Maria?

A warm welcome was given by the Sta. Maria West Central School teachers upon Philip's arrival in the town. In return for such a benevolent gesture, Philip pledged a cash donation to the school as his personal contribution.

The schoolteachers, in appreciation, tendered a little snack party in his honor. It was not long before Philip and Illuminada were introduced to each other. The teasing then suddenly became so unbearable for Illuminada that she suddenly complained of a headache.

Unknown to the other schoolteachers (except for a few), a secret romance did blossom between Illuminada and Philip. Illuminada's brother kept a low profile this time. Only the three closest friends of Illuminada knew that the two (Philip and Illuminada) visited the US Embassy in Manila – but for whatever reason, Illuminada chose not to talk about it. But soon after, even the few who knew about the clandestine relationship thought it had already fizzed out, particularly when they learned that Philip had flown back to Hawaii, all by himself. Little did they know that love letters were soon written and exchanged between the two.

The schoolteachers were thus jolted when they learned several months after, that Philip's petition (fiancee visa) for Illuminada had arrived. It was only then that Illuminada blushinglly recounted the whole story to them, as they gathered around her, in yet another snack party.

When the teachers tendered a *despedida* party for Illuminada, they wished her well. Even her brother wished her happiness with Philip too. For her part, Illuminada countered in jest that she knew better.

In Honolulu, the couple's wedding was a well-attended one. Many Sta. Marians in Hawaii, according to stories, flocked to the church where the ceremony was held. Having many friends, old man Philip received his guests' heartfelt congratulations. During the reception, everybody partook of native Ilocano food and delicacies in great abundance.

Philip's small fortune in the bank was enough to provide them a comfortable life in a cozy home (1910 Hau Street, Honolulu), yet, Iluminada felt "she missed her little schoolchildren." Soon after, she qualified for a teaching job in a nearby school — this time, the children of Filipino immigrants in the area as her pupils. Being retired, Philip volunteered to do the marketing and cooking on weekdays while his wife taught at school. On weekends, Iluminada did her share of the chores, too.

Although neither of them knew how to drive, a sleek car stood in their garage — a concrete reminder of Philip's savings during his plantation years. Everytime a niece or nephew or friend visited them, the couple was always treated to "an unhurried tour around the island."

Of late, the couple decided that they should adopt a baby child to share their bountiful blessings and their happy home. Iluminada looks forward to adopting the illegitimate child of her niece back in the Philippines, that is, if arrangements do not falter. But with or without the adopted baby, the couple is proud to declare: "Ours is a happy union, thank God!"¹⁴

As the preceding case studies exemplify, a May-December nuptial could fail or succeed, grow or die, end in disaster or signal a new beginning for the married couple. These are not established patterns however, and many other factors or circumstances, it is believed, could bear varied results or consequences upon such marriages. If anything, the two case histories clarify a point: an old man's affection, especially that of a landing is not always bitter, after all.

CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, the social phenomenon of May-December marriages in Ilocos is best understood when framed in the context of a) the Ilocano work ethic, and b) its migration factor.

THE ILOCANO WORK ETHIC

It is believed that the work ethic so important to the Ilocano is partly attributable to his natural surroundings. Living in a region where there are no great plains, where the hilly and infertile soil

14. As Iluminada's co-teacher, my mother, Consolacion D. Somera, supplied most of the facts in this case study. In addition, my own notes and observations during my one-week stay at the couple's Honolulu home in July 1981 were relied upon. This was soon after my attendance at the Second International Philippine Studies Conference where I read a paper on Hawaii Iloko Literature. The conference was held at Ala Moana Hotel on June 27-30 1981.

yields no rich harvests, he thus found it expedient to seek better economic opportunities beyond his native community.¹⁵

While there seems to be no valid correlation between natural surroundings and a people's cultural ethos, there seems to be a close correspondence between man and nature in the Ilocos so that one cannot help attributing the cultural patterns of the Ilocanos to the effects of nature's adversities. Studies show that the arduous life in the Ilocos has served to influence greatly the behavioral and cultural patterns of the Ilocanos, their work ethic particularly. Despite the limited resources of the region on account of scanty cultivable lands, the bald forests, the rugged terrain and the region's vulnerability to typhoons, the indomitable Ilocano working-man has survived all odds. Indeed, his is "a culture rooted in survival."¹⁶

"Narigat ti biag" (Life is difficult), Ilocano parents are wont to tell their children. This is, in fact, every rural Ilocano's worldview. In the barrios particularly, the child must work as early as he is capable of it, sometimes even quitting school. If he is the eldest son, his is the greatest burden in the family. If he is lucky enough to find early employment, he sends his younger brothers and sisters to school. He migrates to Mindanao, Mindoro or abroad if he gets the chance, and mails money back home. If his parents have become old and incapable of work, he becomes the family's breadwinner. Most of all, he has to forestall or forego marriage plans, if he has any. This is an unwritten policy in every rural Ilocano's home. This uncomplaining Ilocano son realizes one day however, that he has become old. Such is the usual pattern among Ilocanos "who sacrifice for their family's welfare" (agsakripisyoda para iti pamilya), an informant narrated.¹⁷

When he finally turns his attention to the opposite sex, he is "nalakayanen" (already an old man), as the young girls are wont

15. For internal migration patterns of Ilocanos, see Marshall McLennan, *The Central Luzon Plain: Land and Society on the Inland Frontier* (Quezon City: Alemar-Phoenix Publishing House, Inc., 1980). The inter-provincial migration of Ilocanos is specifically discussed in "The Ilocano Movement," Ch. 6, pp. 103-120.

For external migration, see Marcelino Foronda, Jr., "America is in the Heart: Ilocano Immigration to the United States, 1906-1930," *Dialogue* 12:1(1976): 1-54.

16. *Ladaoan: The Ilokos and the Ilocanos* (Manila: The Executive Committee, 1977), p. 9.

17. Philip Directo, 65, puts this in a different light when he poses a rhetorical question: "Is not life lived at the expense of youth?" (Saan kad' nga ti ipapatay ti rugso ti pannakapadas ti biag?)

to call him. "Ngem adu't urnongna!" (But he has savings!), one is wont to add quickly, as the informant substantiated.

"But he was able to save because he worked hard" (Nakaurnong a ta nagtrabaho ngamin), an informant explained, in defense of her aged husband. The work ethic, this statement seems to imply, paves the way for "brighter life," especially for the poor Ilocano farmer or fisherman. With such a statement, the young bride, in fact, understands full well that her husband's prime years have not been spent in vain.

THE MIGRATION FACTOR

Seemingly, marriage and migration do not go together, as HSPA tried to impose during its early recruitment years. As the company's recruitment policy stipulated, single men were favored over married men, for obvious reasons. The times were difficult then and Hawaii proved to be the best opportunity for a "better life" and so many young men of marriageable age forestalled their plans and went to Hawaii instead.

Although some of them did come back after the three-year contract, a great number of them never returned to fulfill their promises to their waiting fiancées. Many migrant young men found the lure of Hawaii's economic benefits too tempting to resist.

Though plantation work was back-breaking, the early Ilocano migrants, who were mostly unschooled rural farmers, labored hard and long in the fields. Their lives were confined to the plantation communities where they stayed in housing quarters provided by the HSPA. If the workers' expectations of higher wages or better working conditions were not met, their discontent however was not widely voiced.¹⁸

It was only when retirement age came that many of these migrant workers felt the strains of their long years of physical labor. Quite suddenly, it dawned upon these docile workingmen that they were tired, old and useless. In a society they could not

18. For a critical discussion of these issues, see Luis Teodoro, Jr., ed. *Out of This Struggle: The Filipinos in Hawaii* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1981). Likewise, see Juan Dionisio, ed. *The Filipinos in Hawaii: The First 75 Years* (Honolulu: Hawaii Filipino News Specialty Publications, 1981). Both books are commemorative volumes, issued during the celebration of the 75th year of Filipino immigration to Hawaii.

call their own, this was a terrible feeling. When loneliness set in, they decided it was time to go back home.

For the landing, a bride was the most logical purpose for coming home, next to his wish to be finally laid to rest in his own native soil. Having worked so hard in the past, the "lonely, old man" felt he deserved everything – even a young wife. On the psychological front, this gave him more than enough self-worth. First, he was able to project an impression of machismo. Virility, he believed, is the mark of a man. Second, he was able to "assert himself" before the eyes of others, despite his age and physical condition. And third, he proved to himself, if indirectly, that his prime was "not wasted at all." All these consequently gave the prospective groom a "sense of being and belonging." This is, in essence, a "strategy to cope with old age", this kind of marriage being illustrative of the impact migration has had on a particular generation of men.¹⁹

In the end, the reality of matrimony to a young, robust bride aptly fulfilled the old Ilocano landing's subliminal craving for social worth, self-esteem and human affection.

Today, even with the HSPA gone and a new wave of migrants entering the US, many oldtimers will still opt to come back, not only to feel secure in their old age after having won young brides, but most importantly, after being uprooted from their ancestral homeland for so long, they will finally return to a place called home.

19. At the other extreme, Stephen Griffiths in his paper "Coping with Old Age in Philippine Emigrant Community" (Second International Philippine Studies Conference, 1981) tried to explore the spinsterhood phenomenon in an Ilocos village, as an offshoot of the predominantly male migration to Hawaii in the early years.

APPENDIX

A Listing of May-December Marriages Solemnized at the Assumption Parish Church in Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur, 1958-1983.

Name of Couple/Age	Date of Marriage	Age Difference
1. Potenciano Burgos, 47 Adelina Bañez, 21	8 December 1958	26
2. Simeon Molina, 49 Noemi Alviar, 25	18 December 1958	24
3. Pantaleon Desono, 54 Rosita Calibuso, 23	14 March 1959	31
4. Estanislao Deasis, 34 Corazon Peña, 16	27 April 1959	18
5. Ulpiano Bello, 52 Maria Tamayo, 34	6 June 1959	18
6. Pastor Sagun, 80 Gertrudis Bautista, 28	13 June 1959	52
7. Modesto Calma, 40 Juana Dasalla, 25	28 August 1959	15
8. Cirilo Mina, 49 Juanita Juan, 17	5 October 1959	32
9. Juan Dasalla, 40 Flora Cabrera, 25	28 October 1959	15
10. Celestino Villalobos, 34 Godofreda Escobar, 19	26 November 1959	15
11. Alfredo Derige, 48 Rosita Jacob, 20	9 January 1960	28
12. Bonifacio Dayag, 39 Juanita Barcena, 21	4 May 1960	18
13. Antonio Antolin, 53 Barolina Domocmat, 20	6 May 1960	33
14. Fortunato Llanes, 42 Lerma Escobar, 23	21 November 1960	19
15. Rosalino Directo, 50 Magdalena Alejo, 32	26 January 1961	18
16. Paciano Romero, 51 Juliana Quiacusan, 29	19 July 1961	22
17. Timoteo Diaz, 55 Rosalina Diga, 39	2 September 1961	16

18. Conrado Geronimo, 41 Leticia Aguyaoy, 21	7 January 1962	20
19. Silvestre Domine, 65 Martha Gaon, 37	29 January 1962	28
20. Filemon Cabcab, 57 Ursula Dato, 21	5 January 1963	36
21. Francisco Divina, 69 Lourdes Escobar, 29	28 January 1963	40
22. Simeon Debis, 66 Carmen Calibuso, 38	30 January 1963	28
23. Enrique Tugade, 41 Caridad Reda, 22	10 October 1963	19
24. Victor Aquino, 52 Eligia Derige, 21	4 January 1964	31
25. Pedro Tagatac, 55 Glenda Degracia, 24	21 March 1964	31
26. Anastacio Soriano, 54 Cecilia Aglibut, 19	20 June 1964	35
27. Paulino Briones, 55 Leoncina Durat, 28	11 December 1964	27
28. Filemon Dayap, 51 Antonina Ribad, 36	8 March 1965	15
29. Clodualdo Barbieto, 70 Carolita Dumlao, 19	28 May 1966	51
30. Geronimo Tamayo, 63 Luisa Duina, 37	26 February 1967	26
31. Gregorio Galinato, 62 Francisca Mendoza, 24	29 March 1967	38
32. Santiago Rabacon, 62 Corazon Velasco, 31	18 July 1970	31
33. Gregorio Azurin, 45 Carmen Imperial, 26	28 May 1971	19
34. Sergio Dagdagan, 66 Josefina Cruz, 27	20 October 1971	39
35. Andres Divina, 61 Elena Cabjuan, 26	26 December 1971	35
36. Artemio Reyes, 67 Herminia Garcia, 22	20 January 1972	45
37. Nicasio Andres, 45 Leticia Alejo, 27	20 May 1972	18
38. Marcos Dasalla, 66 Margarita de Castro, 21	19 August 1972	45

39. Julian Agoot, 65 Clarita Umipig, 30	31 December 1972	35
40. Emilio Dumlao, 49 Milagros Retagle, 28	25 May 1973	21
41. Pedro Umipig, 59 Pacita Dasalla, 30	19 June 1973	29
42. Enrique Andrada, 67 Constancia Dandoy, 19	22 December 1973	48
43. Ciriaco Torres, 56 Teresita Pe Benito, 27	12 January 1974	29
44. Julio Donato, 59 Patricia Eling, 25	18 April 1974	34
45. Feliciano Mendoza, 42 Norma Villano, 20	18 May 1974	22
46. Cornelio Casabar, 66 Carolina Juan, 21	29 May 1974	45
47. Jose Cablayan, 64 Teresita Llanes, 27	16 November 1974	37
48. Esteban Eligio, 70 Ligaya Garcia, 24	24 December 1974	46
49. Faustino Ramirez, 72 Aurora Manzano, 22	29 December 1974	50
50. Antonio Pumaras, 69 Rosa Reboldela, 28	20 January 1975	41
51. Placido Arreola, 63 Rosita Laya, 42	19 January 1975	21
52. Lorenzo Castillo, 65 Nenita Garcia, 19	28 November 1975	46
53. Manuel Toribio, 63 Leonida Ramos, 18	4 March 1976	45
54. Fernandico Dosono, 63 Leoncia Felicitas, 37	10 September 1976	26
55. Manuel Domendenden, 72 Felicidad Quyon, 19	20 October 1976	53
56. Francisco Alves, 69 Tita Defiesta, 21	15 January 1977	48
57. Alejandro Ramos, 40 Myrna Casila, 24	28 May 1977	16
58. Salvador Casallo, 69 Fredelina Dasalla, 23	17 August 1977	46
59. Francisco Cabingas, 77 Alicia Vesquera, 21	17 October 1977	56

60. Marcelino Sobremento, 66 Ernestina Dato, 39	21 December 1977	27
61. Anselmo Carrido, 44 Juliana Directo, 19	28 January 1978	25
62. Narciso de la Cruz, 67 Asuncion Zamora, 34	4 March 1978	33
63. Estanislao Villaros, 65 Florencia Orabio, 26	2 October 1978	39
64. Lorenzo Pajarillo, 70 Dominga Candorna, 32	26 October 1978	38
65. Bienvenido Pascua, 58 Perpetua Cotillon, 26	16 December 1978	32
66. Renato Delirio, 43 Regina Manuel, 16	9 June 1979	27
67. Tiburcio Daproza, 74 Natalia Dagdag, 25	25 April 1980	49
68. Silvino Sagun, 74 Norma Mina, 21	27 September 1980	53
69. Lucio Raquiños, 82 Pacita Dasalla, 36	31 December 1982	46
70. Gabriel Balubar, 59 Judita Talaña, 27	31 December 1982	32