

mon law marriage by Philippine lawyers, such as Paras, p. 248, and sociologists, as well as by writers in many countries, as a descriptive term) is a social fact. Even if a society does not legally recognize common law marriage, it must provide for children born to parents not legally married, which is the point I made in my article, and with which Prof. Juco agrees.

Since I am not discussing either the granting of citizenship to alien Chinese nor what the law considers "proper and irreproachable conduct" of petitioners, the other comments of Prof. Juco may be considered as interesting, but not directly related to the thesis of my article. I stand with Prof. Juco on favoring "the solidarity of the family" in his article, p. 59, but

this also was not within the scope of my article.

The law speaks the same words to all, but it is subject to differences in interpretation. I think it is interesting to note here that we in the Philippines accord to lawyers high status position. In contrast, when we left China in 1951, there were no practicing lawyers—law was one of the first professions to be abolished in Communist China. I am sure Prof. Juco and I are both grateful for our privilege of discussing both legal and other social aspects of this and other subjects in the democratic environment of the Philippines. I look forward to meeting Prof. Juco and hope we may have further helpful conversation.

A Comparative Analysis of Two Studies on Utang na Loob

ROBERT LAWLESS

*University of the Philippines
Diliman, Quezon City*

In recent years the *utang na loob* concept has generated much interest among students of Philippine culture. Several writers give it great importance in the comprehending of the processes of social interaction.¹ A greater understanding of the principles and operations of *utang na loob* should be gained from reading all the pertinent literature, but, in addition, a critical analysis and comparison of two highly respected studies should yield an even greater understanding, along

with a sharpening of our critical outlook. Two authoritative studies of *utang na loob* are Charles Kaut's "Utang na Loob: A System of Contractual Obligation among Tagalogs"² and Mary Hollnsteiner's "Reciprocity in the Lowland Philippines."³

A preliminary reading of the two papers shows (A) striking similarities in fieldwork, (B) great differences in style and tone, (C) some seemingly direct contradictions, and, finally, (D) some complements. Our paper, then, will be divided into these four sections, each section representing a critical follow-up of our first impressions.

¹ Charles Kaut, "Utang na Loob: A System of Contractual Obligation among Tagalogs," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 17, No. 3, (Autumn 1961), p. 256: "Because the system operates to define the limits of socially meaningful relations among individuals and, to a large degree, determines the nature of such relations, its understanding is crucial to an understanding of bilateral social organization and some of its structural basis in the Philippines."

² *Ibid*, pp. 256-172.

³ Mary Hollnsteiner, "Reciprocity in the Lowland Philippines," *Four Readings on Philippine Values*, Frank Lynch (ed.), Ateneo de Manila University Press, Second Revised Edition, 1964, 22-49.

Similarities in Fieldwork

Both Hollnsteiner and Kaut are anthropologists. Living in Bulacan, in Tagalog barrios probably not more than 25 kilometers apart, they gathered their data at about the same time: Kaut, 1956 to 1958; Hollnsteiner, 1959 to 1960. Hollnsteiner worked in a fishing village 21 kilometers north of Manila; and Kaut, in Barrio Kapitangan, Paombong.

Explaining his method of obtaining data, Kaut writes, "The first few months had involved much reciprocal gift-giving and aid—on my part and on that of certain people of the barrio, specifically my immediate neighbors and their kin—so that I had become an integral part of an obligation network."⁴ Hollnsteiner makes no attempt to explain how she gathered her information or to explain her role in the community: as an outsider, as a participant-observer, as a native. This, in our opinion, is a serious omission, and even Kaut's short explanation is far from adequate.

In the physical sciences the scheme of all experiments must be meticulously reported, and in the behavioral sciences psychologists and sociologists, at least, must report in detail the design they use in gathering data. Operating perhaps with a sense of self-righteousness, imagining they are gathering "pure" data with no pre-prejudicing scheme or design or theory, the anthropologists usually present the reader with data as though it were gathered by an omnipresent, all-seeing infallible Great Recorder, causing the reader difficulties in evaluating the report.⁵

⁴ Kaut, p. 262.

⁵ For a plea for tighter designs in acculturations studies and also a plea for the wider use of the psychologists' tools in anthropological studies, see George Spindler and Walter Goldschmidt, "Experimental Design in the Study of Culture Change," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Spring 1952), pp. 68-83.

Also, the anthropologist, of course, cannot escape the trappings of his own language and the background of his training in the tradition

Differences in Style and Tone

A discussion of style and tone will, of course, be very subjective, so, first, a statement of our prejudices is required. Above all, Hollnsteiner's work has less depth than Kaut's.

Hollnsteiner seems interested in cataloging and listing, and then in describing arbitrary situations; Kaut, in dynamic processes and selected, representative examples.

Beginning her paper with a gross assumption, Hollnsteiner writes, "In the Philippines, where people are so concerned about getting along with others"⁶ we must understand reciprocity. Where is her authority for saying Filipinos "are so concerned about getting along with others"? Perhaps here she missed the chance to cite Frank Lynch's "Social Acceptance," a study whose conclusions about the Philippine emphasis on getting along with others are highly questionable.

Kaut makes no such assumptions, and, after describing the setting, he states his purposes:

First, [this paper] is an attempt to lay the foundation for further analysis and understanding of Tagalog society in particular and structurally similar societies in general. Secondly, and subsidiarily, this system of social usages is presented to provide a primer on social behavior among Tagalogs for

of Western science. As many linguistic and anthropological studies have shown, every culture selects and abstracts into its language, and thereby into its thought patterns, aspects of reality necessarily different from those that other cultures select.

To describe one culture in the terminology of another seems to violate the anthropologists' own code of cultural relativity. We are each prisoners of our own culture, and the anthropologists should be in the best position to realize this. But anthropologists, so smugly pointing out the ethnocentrism and the strait-jacket-like theories of the other disciplines, seem blind to the "disciplinacentrism" inherent in a science that proclaims it can gather theory-free data and give culture-free interpretations.

⁶ Hollnsteiner, p. 22.

the foreigner who wishes to live, work, and interact with [them].⁷

He then explains the organization of his study, divided into two sections:

In the first, I will outline the system in the abstract, as a model. In the second section, I will try to show how the concept . . . operates . . . in [a] barrio as it (1) reflects an underlying belief system and sanctioning system; (2) as it is internalized by the individual; and (3) as it poses the structure and process of social organization.⁸

Kaut's organizational scheme and fluent presentation brings to light the inadequacies of Hollnsteiner's treatment of the concept of utang na loob.

More on the level of scholarship, we find that Hollnsteiner translates utang na loob only twice: once as "debt of gratitude"⁹ and then later as "a debt inside oneself."¹⁰ Both translations are inadequate. Kaut translates it as a "debt of primary obligation"¹¹ and then gives the term extensive linguistic treatment.¹² We are much more satisfied with Kaut.

In general, Hollnsteiner does not place utang na loob in its social setting, not even in its cultural setting. Throughout the paper she is weak in social structure and social organization. She gives a rather unsatisfactory, superficial explanation of "intra-family utang na loob"¹³ but never attempts to explain how utang na loob operates within the all-important Philippine kinship bonds.

From her paper we receive the impression that utang na loob is an omnipresent, mystical, all-embracing force pervading the Filipino "soul".

After this very inadequate theoretical presentation, Hollnsteiner begins what she

calls "occasions in which utang na loob is incurred and then she presents a description of situations through which these obligations may be wholly or partially repaid."¹⁴ This entails an apparently arbitrary listing of situations that, if it has any purpose at all, seems to apologize to the foreigner (read, *American*) for certain aspects in Philippine culture: using poor relatives as household help, the gift-giving maliciously seen by Americans (and Philippine columnists) as graft.

The great differences in style and tone then are Kaut's obvious incisiveness and loquacity over Hollnsteiner's less tightly-knit assumptions and not too specific definitions.

Seeming Contradictions

"Utang na loob reciprocity is most consciously generated when a transfer of goods or services takes place between individuals belonging to two different groups."¹⁵—Hollnsteiner.

"Utang na loob initiatory situations . . . between persons without biological or ritual relationship [are] practically non-existent."¹⁶—Kaut.

These two statements seem to be contradictory. The first difficulty is that Hollnsteiner offers no description of the social context in which utang na loob operates. This sentence is the only statement that passes for an explanation of social interaction, and it vaguely refers to "two different groups." For a trained anthropologist to use the term *group* without any suggestion of a definition borders on incompetence. The word had been defined, haggled over and redefined in numerous ways by both anthropologists and sociologists, and has been regarded by

⁷ Kaut, pp. 256-257.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

⁹ Hollnsteiner, p. 23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹¹ Kaut, pp. 256-257.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 257.

¹³ Hollnsteiner, p. 31.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁶ Kaut, p. 262.

some as useless as the term *race*.¹⁷ But here is Hollnsteiner boldly using it, completely undefined, and basing a key principle of utang na loob on the very idea of whether an individual receives a service or goods from someone "of his own group" or someone "not of his own group." We begin to wonder about this "group" when we notice that Kaut states that utang na loob initiatory situations outside of consanguineal, affinal, and ritual kinship ties are almost nonexistent. Just what groups is Hollnsteiner referring to?

Kaut goes on to say, "Attempts to confirm utang na loob relationships with a distant relative also are fraught with possible danger since there are too many unknowns on both sides."¹⁸ From Hollnsteiner we receive the impression that any Filipino can establish utang na loob with any other Filipino simply by doing something for the others. Kaut, in fact, states that a Tagalog will attempt to establish utang na loob *only* with someone in his group, which Kaut defines as an "obligation network" set up on consanguineal, affinal, and ritual kinship ties.¹⁹

Another example of Hollnsteiner's one-shot, two-dimensional picture of Phil-

¹⁷ See Charles K. Warriner, "Groups Are Real: A Reaffirmation," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 21, No. 5 (Oct. 1956), pp. 540-554.

¹⁸ Kaut, p. 263. Kaut points out (*ibid.*, p. 260) that the potential gift-giver, in addition to ascertaining that the potential receiver is within the giver's obligation network, must ascertain whether this potential receiver will be responsive and whether he will be capable of repaying: if the potential receiver is forced to refuse the gift, this will lead to serious consequences, for the refusal carries with it the implication that the balking receiver is directly insulting the frustrated giver and/or that these two are not members of the same group, the obligation network. But, according to Kaut (*ibid.*, p. 269), "Refusal is rare on an overt level because to refuse is to insult and insults are serious matters. Rather, a verbal commitment is made which the promiser has no intention of honoring as he feels that the person (usually a stranger or foreigner) has no real right to ask for such a thing." We hear of none of this from Hollnsteiner.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

ippine society against Kaut's deeper, more contemplative picture—contrasts eventually leading to contradictions—is their discussions of superordinate-subordinate utang na loob relations, particularly landlord-tenant relations. To Hollnsteiner this is an eternal big guy-little guy relationship, never changing, never altering;²⁰ whereas to Kaut:

Succeeding generations of an original tenant-landlord relationship progressively come to have less of a unilateral relationship than the first (or initiating) generation. The *mayari-maysaka* (owner or the land-holder of the land) distinction becomes a less unilaterally emphasized one and emphasis is placed on mutual obligations between owner and tenant, symbolized linguistically by one term applied to both: *kasama* (companion).²¹

Kaut always has the upper hand in these contradictions, not necessarily because he is always right—we are in no position to determine this—but because his statements, showing a more mature scholarship, are always firmly consistent with his well-laid theoretical groundwork.

Complements

Since we have mercilessly criticized Hollnsteiner in the first three sections of this paper, we will, in this last section, endeavor to show where her study complements Kaut's, where she shows insights lacking in Kaut's paper, and where she notes things of worth missed by Kaut.

First, Hollnsteiner's paper is on reciprocity, not only on utang na loob, and she investigated two other types of reciprocity: contractual and quasi-contractual. Since Kaut's and her paper coincide only on utang na loob and since the other two categories of reciprocity seem not at all peculiar to Philippine society, we reviewed only what Hollnsteiner wrote about utang na loob.

²⁰ Hollnsteiner, p. 30.

²¹ Kaut, p. 266.

In her discussion of occasions for reciprocity, Hollnsteiner makes an important point that Kaut should have covered in the second section of his paper:

The functions of festive occasions, therefore, include not only the fulfillment of religious obligations, meeting family and friends, distributing of wealth, and opportunities for status climbing or reaffirming one's high status; they are also major means of repaying one's social obligations, mandatory in Philippine culture, or at least of indicating to the invited that one recognizes an existing debt relationship.²²

A second interesting point of Hollnsteiner's that Kaut does not go into is Philippine attitudes toward utang na loob:

Lest the reader get the impression, however, that being an utang na loob debtor makes one unhappy, it should be made clear that this is not necessarily so where friends are concerned. Each enjoys doing favors for the other and is generally not conscious of the interplay of debt relationships. They are more than willing to emphasize their special closeness through reciprocal favor-doing 'with no strings attached.'²³

This point needs more investigation, placed against a good theoretical framework concerned with where anthropologists should draw the line on drawing inferences: how much of any one concept actually exists in the studied culture and how much of it exists only in the mind of the investigator.

Along these lines, Hollnsteiner observes:

Actual awareness of what each has done for the other or what each owes the other comes most often with a veering toward a clearly one-sided arrangement or a breaking-up of the friendship altogether. As the genuine desire to be closely bound to someone

declines, there is a corresponding growth of uneasiness at being on the debtor side of an utang na loob relationship.²⁴

Then again, Kaut may not have touched on this problem of whether an utang na loob debtor is happy or unhappy about his situation or whether he is consciously aware of it, because the problem may not have presented itself under Kaut's emphasis on the social context in which utang na loob operates; he puts the development of utang na loob relationships in three stages: initiatory, unstable fluctuation, and a:

culmination of a long, intimate, and active obligation association: complete reciprocity of mutual support and aid so that two individuals become complementary utang na loob partners. In this stage, one is never exclusively in debt to the other but, rather, they are so-equally indebted (*kautang na loob*).²⁵

Hollnsteiner, in her presentation of static relations, fails to note anything of this sort, and so her explanation ("Lest the reader," etc.) is necessary.

Perhaps the major contribution of Hollnsteiner is in noting "the ambivalent attitude many modern Filipinos have toward utang na loob."²⁶ She says that with increasing acceptance of a cash economy there is an "increasing resistance to the pattern of utang na loob reciprocity."²⁷ We agree with her that this is worthy of further study.

In summary then we'll say that Kaut's study should be read for good scientific data and expert interpretation, and Hollnsteiner may be read as an impressionistic study brightened by some interesting and important insights.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Kaut, p. 266.

²⁶ Hollnsteiner, p. 47.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²² Hollnsteiner, p. 39.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.