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# The Filipino as Libertarian

Contemporary Implications of Anarchism

Charles J-H MacDonald

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## Abstract

Modern Philippine society presents a number of traits that have puzzled or fascinated social scientists: an apparent looseness of organization, institutional fuzziness, intense factionalism, moral values geared toward smooth interpersonal interaction, a weak sense of public good, and a bilateral kinship system. This article revisits these points and makes sense of them by using a model of society called “anarchic” or “open-aggregated.” This conceptual grid applies to other societies and cultures, but is particularly enlightening with respect to Filipino values, their institutional style, and preferred types of behavior. Particular attention is paid to kinship and politics, to *pakikisama* and *utang na loob*, and generally to an ethos of *communitas* and *Gemeinschaft* prevalent among Filipinos.<sup>1</sup>

## Dedication

*for Professor Y. Kikuchi*

## Introduction

In the following pages I propose to look at Philippine contemporary society from a new angle, while revisiting some of the sociological and anthropological literature current in the 1960s and the 1970s. In doing this I shall be guided by a conceptual model of collective living that I call “open-aggregated” or “anarchic.” In its purest form it can be observed only among simple and traditional groups of hunters and gatherers, foragers, shifting agriculturists, and sea nomads. Its principles are those of sharing, equality of status (“anarchic” in the etymological sense), and networks of weak and immanent ties. Its oper-

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Tom Gibson, Anthony Reid, and Mina Roces for their helpful comments on a previous version of this paper.

ation is dependent on what I call “conditions of felicity” of collective life. Within “social” organizations these principles still survive with an important but somewhat marginal role. They can be found in numerous aspects of what is termed “civil society”: fellowships, neighborhoods, informal gatherings, and so forth.

Although the great majority of modern Filipinos lives in circumstances vastly different from that of the handful of tribal people who pursue a more traditional way of life, I claim that the more ancient, open-aggregated, and anarchic style of life, with its ethical dimensions, is still alive and relevant to present circumstances, and that it helps explain certain important aspects of contemporary social, political, and economic reality. This is true of all societies, but I claim that its validity applies with particular salience in the case of the Filipino.

I shall pay special attention to the contributions to social science and to Philippine anthropology of Yasuchi Kikuchi, a scholar who has made original and insightful propositions, which have led to a better understanding of the inner workings of Philippine society. One of these propositions, which I want to discuss here, concerns the “uncrystallized” nature of Philippine society. But let me first explain what I mean by “anarchy.”

## Anarchy and Social Order

As stated above, a number of small, scattered tribal communities belong to a class of organizations found throughout the world: the open-aggregated, anarchic, strictly egalitarian, and mostly peaceable type. In other essays and articles (Macdonald 2008a, 2012) I have defined this form of community as one that stands on a distinct evolutionary path, its working principles being at complete odds with those that organize society—as we understand it (see below). This type of organization, open-

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aggregated and anarchic, existed and continues to exist side by side with incipient social orders and hierarchically organized systems. This is particularly obvious in the Philippine-Borneo-peninsular Malaysia area (the northeastern quadrant of insular Southeast Asia). Completely devoid of any military apparatus and adept at a run-and-hide strategy, open-aggregated anarchic communities endured as long as there was enough free space for them to use as refuges, away from predatory slaving states.

The principles on which their existence was based are to be found in a culture of strict equalitarianism, an ethos of sharing, a high degree of personal autonomy, nonviolence,<sup>2</sup> and immanent solidarity of a group composed of individuals or elementary families. In contrast, “society” as we understand it, even in the most democratic regimes, is premised on status difference and ranking, strong leadership, debt-generating reciprocity, and the historical creation of transcendent collective entities such as the “nation-state.”<sup>3</sup>

Open-aggregated communities are not protosocial or antisocial. They are asocial. Such communities have been described by numerous ethnographers, and examples abound: Buid from Mindoro, Palawan from Palawan island, Tiruray (or Teduray) and Subanun from Mindanao, Sama Dilaut from the Philippine and Malaysian waters, Semai from peninsular Malaysia, Penan from Borneo; further afield: Paliyan from southern India, Pi-

<sup>2</sup> Nonviolence has to be understood not as the absence of any violent acts, but as the absence of organized violence. The Ilongot must be seen as a rather exceptional case of violent behavior in an otherwise anarchic and nonaggressive culture.

<sup>3</sup> Its “imaginary” nature has been famously analyzed by Benedict Anderson (1983), who has suspected but not clearly defined its profound anthropological dimension. Its transcendence is clearly an ideological displacement of strong personal ties centered on persons toward an allegiance to a collective entity construed as a supernatural person (the nation as divine/surrogate parent). This figuration has become the cornerstone of a globalized order defined as a Conference of Nations.

aroa from South America, Inuit from the Arctic, and many others. They consist mainly of culturally sophisticated populations that cohere through personal ties of friendship and fellowship; cooperate in temporary groups (local bands, settlements, moorings); share common values and cultural traits; engage in recreational and artistic activities (such as music, dance, chanting, poetry, story-telling, games, ceremonies, and rituals); tend to avoid violent confrontation internally and externally; and use bilateral kinship to structure their partly asymmetrical relations of seniority and affinity not conducive to an overall ranking system (see Macdonald 2011). I cannot develop here all these points in detail and will elaborate on some aspects only of the anarchic and open-aggregated form of collective life, aspects that are relevant to contemporary Philippine culture.

It is important to emphasize that, contrary to the Western or Eastern concept of society linked to the idea of the nation-state, bounded groups have no permanence or any conceptual priority'. People cohere because they like or tolerate each other enough to undertake repeated cooperative action. They thus combine in aggregates and form fellowships on the basis of common action, mutual aid, solidarity' in purpose, joint endeavor, and person-to-person interaction. How they come to like, tolerate, or care for each other, in other words, how they collectively form bonds outside the nuclear family is the topic I will elaborate from here on.

In all social organizations, "open-aggregated" or "anarchic" principles of organization do apply today to realms of personal behavior, like friendships, and to sectors of activities that belong to so-called "civil society." To make my point clearer let me summarize it again: there are two sets of principles that are at odds with each other, the "anarchic" and the "social"; these principles apply to all societies either in being the very' principles that organize the body collective (creating nation-states, for instance, as opposed to "open- aggregated" tribal communi-

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ties) or in remaining a residual but resilient dimension within various types of social organizations.

The anarchic dimension seen as an independent and sui generis principle, rather than a deviation or a corruption of a principle of order, social or otherwise, explains much if one looks at various aspects of Philippine society or societies. In this article I shall endeavor to illustrate this point by looking at a number of aspects that have been discussed in the social sciences literature about the Philippines, namely, its loose or “uncrystallized” nature, its moral principles or values (like *pakikisama* and *utang na loob*), the force of family and personal ties superseding those of the national community, its intense factionalism, and some others. Along the way I will present and explain some of the above model’s key concepts (such as “weak ties,” “conditions of felicity,” and “sharing”). I will start with the notion of “uncrystallized” society’.

## Uncrystallized Society and the Politics of Kinship

Kikuchi (1991, vi) defined the concept of “uncrystallized’, as applying to a society’ that is “bilateral or cognatic in form.” In such a society corporate or quasi-corporate groups can emerge but are based on locality, not descent (ibid., vii). Later Kikuchi (ibid., 22) explained that an uncrystallized society’, or community, is one where non-kinsmen are not trusted; trust goes only to kinsmen. Clearly, then, such a social body rests on kinship, or blood ties, but they themselves cannot produce that which is at the heart of society, namely, a strong, permanent, leader-centered, clearly identified, bounded group. Such is the paradox: a society based on kinship where kinship by itself cannot create a truly social group. Behind this view, and as an important connotation of the same idea, is the general observation of other anthropologists (such as Kroeber 1919 and Pehrson

1954, cited by Kikuchi 1991, 1, 19) acknowledging the amorphous and loosely organized nature of Philippine tribal society or even Philippine society in general.

John Embree (1950), in a widely noticed article, proposed the concept of loose social structure, or “loosely structured social system,” or “structural looseness.” He applied it to Thai society; but a commentator rightly observed that Thais, like Filipinos, share certain orientations that are in sharp contrast to those of the Vietnamese or Japanese, for instance, nongroup organization, bargained rather than ascribed status, loyalty to persons rather than strict obedience to norms, weak social sanctions, and flexible social roles (Anderson 1970, 418). One very interesting point was that these characteristics were presented as functional and adaptive and did not prevent society at large from being well integrated. At the same time, the discussion stressed the complexity of such an organization based on interpersonal negotiations and high individualism.

This situation of complexity and indeterminacy was not conducive to form a clear picture of what conceivably could be a predictable social order. Social scientists still clung to the idea that there must be stable collective institutions, preferably similar to the classical notion of corporation used by sociology and anthropology so far. By combining blood ties, emergent leadership, coresidence, moral values, and cultural habits, Kikuchi (1991, 6, 31–32, 34, 41, *passim*) and others as well sought to prove that something like a corporate group was emerging, with some of the characteristics of a unilineal kinship group. The “crystallization” process through which a society becomes truly united at a higher level is thus, according to this approach, emerging in the Philippines. Kikuchi (*ibid.*, 47) spoke of an “emergent pattern of corporate organization,” exemplified by the Tagalog *angkan* (kindred, clan, bilateral descent group) (*ibid.*, 24–27). In a previous work he saw in the Batangan local group, *gaban*, and even in the entire Batangan society an emerging corporate group,

Kikuchi was right in seeing in Philippine societies randomness, chaos, personalistic values, and weak corporation. What he called “uncrystallized” is more or less what I have defined as an orientation toward harmonious anarchy: a way of life followed by many indigenous communities in the past, fated to certain demise under the onslaught of dominant, violent-prone, rigidly ranked, state-centered societies, but still surviving here and there, in geographical fringes, among some indigenous communities. But even in prehispanic state formations with a strong sense of hierarchy, a degree of looseness was present in constantly competing kin-based groups, in strategies of interpersonal rather than bureaucratic dominance. In the countryside, cities, and slums it survives as an essential dimension in the life of the *tao*. The open-aggregated, libertarian, and essentially peaceful form of community life stemming from the cooperation of autonomous agents has been largely abandoned today in favor of the authoritarian social order and its incarcerating structure of closed groups. However, it still survives, against all odds, in a few refuges here and there throughout the world, and its felicitously uncrystallized spirit remains alive in the hearts and minds of many men and women living in rural and urban areas all over the Philippines.

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scendent, and impersonal ties.<sup>18</sup> One is a cage made of widely spaced bars; the other is a box with solid walls. A member of a community ruled by anarchic principles grounded in concrete, immanent, and person-to-person relations is reluctant to become blindly loyal to an abstract principle or to put faith in a transcendent reality'. Anarchic or, let us say, libertarian loyalties are toward persons, and they are limited or temporary'. Strong ties and life-and-death loyalties are inventions made by a good number of societies at some point in history, prior to the development of empires (see Testart 2004) and predate by thousands of years the emergence of the modern nation-state. The path chosen by anarchic/libertarian peoples thus did not predispose them in any way to alienate themselves to an abstract idea of a collective, god-like, Durkheimian self. Hence, the attitudes of some indigenous communities when it comes to defending their rights within the arena of corporate interests are puzzling (see Macdonald 2008b). They understand what loyalty is, but it has—incredibly for us members of social orders—no permanent and binding value when directed toward a frozen collective interest in the long term. This point is probably the most interesting and disconcerting aspect of what social scientists like Kikuchi see in Philippine societies. If some social scientists are puzzled over the lack of social consciousness of their respondents, over their weak sense of the public good (Zialcita 2005, 19, 34, 70), it may be that these observers are just looking at free libertarian minds who do not want to submit themselves to the tyranny of the collective and who put personal and kin ties over any collective, group, or public interest. Indigenous anarchic people, however, do have a strong sense of the community as long as it rests on personal ties of friendship and fellowship expressed in the idiom of kinship.

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<sup>18</sup> "A community that *transcends* ties of kinship and locality" and "a community that is *abstractly* conceived yet real" (Zialcita 2005, 39, italics added).

due to an incipient principle of political leadership around a leading household line (Kikuchi 1984, 33–34). Similarly in Alangan society a local group tended toward the definition of a corporate group centered on a "caretaker" (ibid., 53). However Kikuchi made the following statements: "In the Philippines, there is, generally speaking, no corporate group=community" (ibid., 86), and "Except for those in the Muslim areas, Philippine societies are bereft of formal political leadership and structure" (Kikuchi 1991, 55). Horizontal corporate groups emerge nonetheless, according to him, as a result of common social values (like pakikisama, utang na loob, and so on; see below) and the existence of a central figure of authority (ibid., 55–56).

To summarize Kikuchi's position, as I understand it, one can say that societies in the Philippines are based on a bilateral kinship system, with ego-centered kindreds precluding the formation of the typical and theoretical unilineal ancestor-based and corporate lineage or clan. This fact alone renders Philippine society amorphous and uncrystallized. However, through what can be seen as a dialectical process, incipient corporate groups emerge based on common residence, common values, and incipient leadership, giving some measure of rigidity' and strength to groupings and relations that otherwise are devoid of form and structure.<sup>4</sup>

These propositions call for a number of critical comments, one being that they oversimplify and merge in the vague and all-embracing notion of "Philippine society" completely different social and historical formations that should not be lumped together, but treated separately. However, they contain a profound element of truth, which in the following pages I would like to analyze and develop more fully.

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<sup>4</sup> These ideas were also presented in a separate publication: Kikuchi 1989, 27–47.

The notion of uncrystallized society has found merit in the eyes of Filipino historian Mina Roces (2001, 43), who writes that *politico de familia* (kinship politics) is consonant with the idea of an uncrystallized society, defined in this case as implying “a constant state of rival kinship alliance groups competing for power.” Kinship politics dominates the political life of the country and subverts democratic institutions; in other words, “kinship politics turns the democratic system into a machine for its own ends” (ibid., 44). Extreme factionalism based on family ties is a well-known element in the life of the country from the municipal level to the province and to the nation. It explains Philippine society’s volatility and maybe also its violence.<sup>5</sup> Political life ruled by local elites and a weak centralized state are also common factors called in to explain the weak, unstable, and uncrystallized nature of Philippine society in general. The important idea these observations suggest is that blood ties and intrafamily solidarity have not been entirely superseded by state institutions. Kin-based factionalism thus prevents loyalty to the nation.

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<sup>5</sup> In a recent article published in the Asia Foundation website (Buenaobra 2009), one learns that a certain Victor Valera, former governor of Abra, was arrested for the murder of political rival Cong. Luis Bersamin. Nothing unusual, according to the writer, who characterizes Abra as the ‘murder capital of the north.’ What makes the story interesting from our point of view is the fact that another Bersamin, Eustaquio, brother of Luis, is none other than the governor of the province. The “intense political rivalry” between contending parties, which explains the violence, is then clearly also a rivalry between families. A more recent and more violent incident in Mindanao, in which at least fifty-nine people have been murdered, arose on 23 Nov. 2009, when a group of supporters were preparing to file a certificate of candidacy for a candidate opposed to a ruling dynasty in Maguindanao. La Vifta and Acheron (2012) stress the fact that election-related violence (ERV) is similar in Abra and Mindanao: “Like ERV in Abra. ERV in Maguindanao follows the same basic characteristics: presence of long-standing political families that have used violence to stay in power and are protected by politicians at the national level.”

of old traditions, gregarious and egalitarian values promoting mutual aid and universal sharing have been subverted and used in a manner favorable to the hierarchical social order of colonizers, local elites, and the state.

The loose texture and informal quality of social life in the Philippines in general are strongly reminiscent of the peaceful, anarchic harmony characteristic of many (not all) indigenous peoples in this part of Southeast Asia. Events in recent political history of the country can be used as indicators.<sup>16</sup> Maybe we should revisit the EDSA uprisings and demonstrations of 1986 and 2001 to discover at its core an affirmation of the anarchic spirit that lies deep inside the Filipino soul: a distrust of state power and a gregarious, egalitarian cline reveling in horizontal ties of brotherly and peaceable companionship. This spirit manifested itself in the 1986 EDSA uprising as essentially courageous, selfless, and nonviolent, in a manner reminiscent of the teachings of another ancient anarchist, the one who inspired the Sermon on the Mount. Other commentators have come to the same conclusions and correctly seen in the EDSA phenomenon an instance of *communitas*, a “selfless flux of anti-hierarchical state” (Azurin 1995, 99).<sup>17</sup>

A point that space does not allow me to develop fully is the crucial question of group formation, one that is central to the idea of uncrystallized or anarchic organization. Anarchic communities are built on weak, concrete, personal, and immanent ties, whereas social order is built on strong, abstract, tran-

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<sup>16</sup> A good ethnographic indicator is the use of nicknames. Aside from their semantic interest and anecdotal quality, they provide a strong indication of a gregarious and egalitarian *dine* in Philippine society. For a clear appraisal of this phenomenon among the Cuyonon, see Eder 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Quoting Kerkvliet and Pinches, and taking a more nuanced view, Cannell (1999, 235–36) speaks of ‘distinctively ambivalent attitudes to hierarchy and inequality which belong to the much more distant past.’

it does not bind anyone to anyone else *in particular*. This principle is a moral basis for community life and in itself completely alien to the notion of utang na loob as practiced in a rural or urban setting fraught with strong binding ties of indebtedness and, as a result, subordination.

## Conclusion

Let me sum up my thoughts so far. The starting point is Kikuchi's idea that Philippine society in general is "uncrystallized," that is, modeled along the lines of a cognatic or bilateral kinship system. However, leadership and common value orientations are factors that unify or "crystallize" it to some extent. Taking stock of these propositions, I have remarked that (1) kinship alone cannot account for a whole social formation, and (2) one cannot speak of just one model of society for all Philippine social formations. In a category of communities I choose to call "open-aggregated and anarchic" the defining traits are a wealth of *weak ties*, the formation of *fellowships* based on specific mles of interaction, highly *autonomous* agents, strict *egalitarianism*, and *sharing*. Its operation is characterized by a degree of randomness and uncertainty in the formation of a social group, which can thus be defined as uncrystallized.

Lowland Christian populations and urban societies are definitely not to be put in the same category as anarchic indigenous or tribal populations because the former are part of an overall social order characterized by class stratification and dominated by a state apparatus. However, they share certain value orientations with their indigenous fellow citizens. One is a strong preference for group membership through pakikisama and reciprocal deference, horizontal ties marked by an engaging, brotherly, and informal attitude. Anarchic indigenous communities shun dominance and debt obligations. However, by a disconcerting twist in the transmission

The uncrystallized nature of Filipino social and political life based on a cognatic, horizontal, and ego-centered family system has not escaped another historian, Alfred McCoy (1994,9), who quotes Kikuchi on this point. The same author sees in elite families in the Philippines an institution that shapes the history of the country (ibid., 1). Combined with the weak state, the bilateral character of the family and its encompassing social functions explain much of the Philippine situation, where strong local elites tend to rule both the political and the economic life. These elite families look like "houses," in the sense given to this term when speaking of the "House of Windsor" or "House of Valois,"<sup>6</sup> and form a kind of Philippine republican royalty.

The defining factors of this general state of "uncrystallization" are: (1) the prevalence of kin and personal ties over institutional and abstract community ties; and (2) the fluidity and factionalism characteristic of alliances based on bilateralism. We are again faced with the same paradox. Kinship is the factor that at one and the same time provides unity and disunity, substance and instability to the social body. If the latter rests on kinship, kinship in itself, especially due to its bilateral nature, provides no unity at a higher level.

The study of kinship is a huge field addressing an enormously complex question. To encapsulate a long and complicated story in a few words, let me venture the following narrative. The importance of kin ties has been theorized as creating social structure on two main grounds. Firstly, it creates putatively "corporate" groups through a mechanism called descent. Secondly, it creates intergroup solidarity through marriage and the mechanism of alliance or affinity (by an exchange and/or circulation of spouses). Anthropologists

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<sup>6</sup> McCoy (1994.10) prefers to speak of "kinship networks." The Levi-Straussian notion of "societe a maison" may apply in this case, but is otherwise a muddled one and cannot be usefully applied to all Philippine societies (see Macdonald 1987).

thought about these facts as laws until they were proved inoperative in a number of cases, particularly in the case of systems such as those found in the Philippines, where there is neither unilineal descent nor “elementary,” affinal systems (Levi-Strauss 1949). Anthropologists working in the Philippines saw nothing of the sort predicated on the ground of descent and alliance theories.

But is kinship a foundation for any social formation? For a long time the idea that blood relations explained primitive society held sway; in contrast, modern society was seen to be based on contracts and written laws. To suggest that modern Philippine society is still based on kinship hints at portraying it as a somewhat “primitive” society’. To what extent is this true? Kinship is extremely important, in ancient as well as present times, in the Philippines and elsewhere. However, social formations have probably never rested on kinship alone. As a sociological mechanism of recruitment, descent is never the sole principle at work, and cognatic ties play an important role even in the most typically unilineal societies.

Kinship, however, does many other things than just create groups. It is also a cognitive grid that reflects cultural categories. It entails values of an ethical nature. Roles and statuses can be defined in the idiom of kinship. It provides a normative model for interpersonal behavior. It creates overlapping fields of social relations, and so on. To put it another way, what we call “kinship” is a multifaceted reality belonging to many subfields and sublevels in the overall social machinery. It is not one thing only; neither does it represent the whole of society. It is then improper to call a social system “cognatic” or “bilateral.” Only kin reckoning is cognatic or bilateral. Theoretical constructs based on kinship alone as a blueprint of society are therefore to be treated with great caution.

Kinship provides the most immediate human environment from which to choose allies and partners. Bilateral networks of kin are just the raw material with which social aggregates

Anthropologists like Sahlins (1965) and others (e.g., Strathern 1988; Godelier 1996) further analyzed reciprocity and developed alternative models. In the meantime some anthropologists, mostly those specialized in hunting and gathering cultures, realized that reciprocity’ did not explain all the facts. It seemed somehow to be absent from a number of important transactions, such as meat sharing. Ethnographers did not always find what makes reciprocity’ work: the obligation to give back, and even the very notion of gift (entailing a debt) as a basic social obligation. Some people were not giving, just taking, and did not even feel obligated to reciprocate. The fact is that these people were not delinquent but models of good behavior in their own cultures (Woodbum 1998). An Inuit informant famously said: “With gifts one makes slaves like with a whip one trains dogs”; and Seneca wrote: “*Beneficium accipere, libertatem vendere est*” (To accept a favor is to sell freedom). The idea then is to *avoid reciprocity as a debt-binding tool that creates a strong tie of subordination*. I have shown that this is a fundamental aspect of an anarchic, open-aggregated way of life. It is called “sharing” (Macdonald 2008a, 2008c, 2012).

Ethnographically the principle of sharing, as opposed to reciprocity, has been clearly identified. For the Philippines, Gibson (1988) was the first anthropologist to show that this model was operational. After doing fieldwork with the Palawan people for many years, I realized also that utangna loob was definitely not one of their favorite values, if it was a value at all. Their most important value was *ingasiq*, which means sympathy, compassion, and the aptitude to give with *no expectation of return*. It was something resembling Sahlins’s general reciprocity, yet different. Nonreciprocal relations—in the sense of not entailing a debt—are the basic rule of anarchy. One can also phrase it differently: if there is reciprocity, it takes place among all members of the community, not just between two persons or two sections. Everyone has an utang na loob to everyone else;

between the seat of power and the place where people actually lived. The real political power of the *principals*, or chiefs, over their supposed constituents must have been limited at best. In all probability' small courts extended symbolic sovereignty over anarchic populations that were in large part independent and mobile. Moreover, the first descriptions of native Philippine society reflected the value orientations of the chroniclers of the time, as did further reports written by modern social scientists and historians. Because members of social systems that are strongly structured around a hierarchical principle have difficulty understanding what an anarchic way of life is all about, sociologically speaking, they project their own concepts of chieftainship and ranking into realities that do not contain them. Informants from nonhierarchical groups are likely to oblige and produce ad hoc fictitious chiefs and leaders in order to satisfy- the inquirer (Macdonald 2008b). The sentiment of gratitude that led to the concept of utang na loob was probably, at least in strictly anarchic nonstate groups, not geared toward subservience but toward its exact opposite inasmuch as *everyone* in the community had utang na loob with *everyone* else. The whole society was bound together, as it were—not one section to another in a one-way street. In the landlord-tenant relationship the one who has utang na loob is the tenant, not the landlord who grants “favors,” thanks to the latter's superior position in society. And, finally, there is another and even more fundamental aspect, one relating to the very notion of reciprocity. I have analyzed this aspect in another essay (Macdonald 2008c) and will therefore attend to it in the briefest manner.

Together with kinship, reciprocity' in a way is the holy grail of social anthropology. The French anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1925) brilliantly analyzed it in his seminal essay, *The Gift*, as a cycle of three successive obligations: to give, to receive, and to give back. This was construed as basic, if not *the* basic, and most central tie binding members of any society.

are made of. The family of origin is the nucleus from which springs a wider net of connections. Those connections, it must be understood, are not activated by virtue of their inherent biological or genetic nature, but are selected by social actors on the basis of individual strategies and personal commitments. The situation has been well described for poor African American families (Stack 1974, 46). In the Philippines likewise one could easily draw a line between “essential kin” (people who take responsibility for a child) and “relatives” (those who maybe connected in the kinship network but “who do not actively create reciprocal obligations”; *ibid.*). The “essential kin” can take many forms and might indeed become a relatively stable and enduring group of interest. Kin, after all, is that section of society that one knows best from an early stage in life and among whom one chooses one's allies. Since bilateral kinship provides so many ties, only some will be selected, thus creating an interest group made of kinsmen. Groups are not constituted thanks to some instinctual mechanism inherent in blood ties, but are the result of deliberate cooperative strategies of aggregation and cooperation. It provides just that, a first batch of potential fellows within the wider community circle. The intricate nexus of crisscrossing dyadic relations in the end has the appearance of a kin group, but what makes it cohere is the cumulative relational wealth of person-to-person ties. This arrangement results in fractures and splits in family lines as it does in strong aggregations of members of the same kindred. The final picture is indeed an “anarchy of families” as was so felicitously described in the title of McCoy's (1994) volume.<sup>7</sup> Instead of being corporations created in perpetuity, kindreds and families remain fragile aggregates from which one can escape or

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Fox originally coined the phrase “anarchy of families” (McCoy 1994, 30. n. 29).

within which realignments are possible.<sup>8</sup> Filipinos do have a way to keep the cage open.

## Weak Ties, Conditions of Felicity, and *Pakikisama*

The capacity and need of humans to interact constantly with each other are not necessarily conducive to the formation of society. Humans are not inherently social, but they are gregarious. Gregariousness has many facets. Its origin is probably based on a reproductive strategy characterized by the production of neotenus and altricial offspring requiring long postpartum protection. The need to nurture children for a longer period of time than necessary for other anthropoids is conducive to the development of a caretaking family (Dentan 2011). Fostering and parental care extended to persons other than the genitors are definitely a human trait, making babies the first human glue in the construction of collective life (ibid.). Mutual aid and cooperation are also adaptive modes of conduct in terms of survival and food procurement. Peaceability and avoidance of violent confrontation are equally adaptive, whereas intraspecific aggression and violence as a rule are disadvantageous—as Kropotkin (1955) explained in the 1890s.

If life in a group rather than solitary existence has become an inherently human trait, modalities of group engagement allow for a good amount of flexibility. I have hypothesized, based on the findings of other primatologists and paleoanthropologists (Maryanski 1994; Maryanski and Turner 1992), that early hominids acquired the capacity to free themselves of the female-

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<sup>8</sup> Some famous examples come to mind, such as the Cojuangco family, with one prominent member being a Marcos crony while another being an oppositionist and future president of the Philippines. Elite families constantly undergo a fission-fusion process according to the whims of political life, personal ambitions, and extrafamily alliances of their members.

former is in debt to the latter, never the other way around. Again, most typically, this relation subsists between a tenant (who “owes”) and a landlord (who “grants favors”) (ibid., 88). This kind of indebtedness is forever: “[the landlord’s granting of favors] binds [the tenant] in *endless gratitude to his benefactor*” (ibid., italics added). Can one imagine a better ideological ploy to insure a constant and permanent subservience on the part of the colonized mass of peasantry’ bound in “endless gratitude” to those who exploit and oppress them? Utang na loob reflects the keen sense of moral obligation on the part of the obliged party to be sure, but its sociological use in cementing an unequal relationship of exploitation is a sad and ironic turn of the historical screw. It greatly served the colonizers and their allies in putting a benevolent paternalistic face on their profiteering scheme.

The IPC-Ateneo School, in my view, has committed three analytical mistakes. The first is to conflate all value orientations and put them in the same bag, not realizing that certain values worked at cross-purposes. The second is to fail to take into full account the overall hierarchical, colonial, and capitalistic structure of Philippine lowland (and probably urban) society and the way such value orientations were either instrumental to it or subverted it. In other words, they confused a value system with a social system. The third is to take for granted a pre-Spanish, original, and vernacular foundation for all these values. Quoting Colin who wrote in 1663, Racelis Hollnsteiner (ibid., 89) writes that the *dato-cabalangay* (datu-follower) relationship “parallels” the landlord-tenant relationship. But this is somewhat spurious, and I shall explain why.

To begin with, petty states with chiefs of the datu type were not everywhere the rule (see above). The majority of the population lived in dispersed settlements loosely aggregated and recognized no hierarchy or chief. Anyhow, in precolonial times, sovereignty’ was defined in religious terms, and the degree of political dependence was measured by the distance



the Spanish realm (Reid 1988), while colonial exploitation and a feudal type of organization induced a marked stratification within peasant communities, creating local elites and imposing a system of land tenure based on large landholdings. Anarchic indigenous communities, whether hunters and gatherers, sea nomads, or swidden agriculturists (Sama, Buid, Palawan, and others) survived in the margins of the colonial empire, such as in the mountainous terrains and remote hinterland of Mindanao, Mindoro, and Palawan islands. In northern Luzon, mountain dwellers had developed an original and independent civilization on the basis of irrigated agriculture, territoriality, social stratification, warfare, and supra-local institutions.

Today the Philippine national community is composed of at least four segments that partly reflect the old colonial situation: (1) dispersed, demographically small, anarchic tribal groups (including hunters and gatherers, sea nomads, shifting agriculturists, and other tribal groups with mixed economies); (2) tribal groups with “social” institutions and an incipient hierarchical order, such as the Cordillera ethnic groups: Ifugao, Kalinga, Bontok, and possibly some Mindanao tribal groups characterized by the *bagani*, “great warrior” syndrome (Macdonald 1987); (3) Christian peasant lowland communities; and (4) urban populations with a class structure under a capitalistic-oriented system. Pre-Spanish sultanates underwent important changes and lost a great deal of their autonomy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries after military defeat at the hands of American colonial power; they reluctantly accommodated the republican structure and met the national agenda.

If pakikisama is a way to ensure togetherness, especially of a peaceful and egalitarian kind, then utang na loob (debt of gratitude, but literally debt from the inside, soul-debt) is its exact opposite. Racelis Hollnsteiner (1975a, 88–89) defines the notion of utang na loob in contradistinction to contractual and semi-contractual reciprocity and as typically taking place between a person of inferior status and a person of superior status. The

centered tightly-knit kin groups of the Cercopithecinae, building their specific sociality on weak ties, that is, ties that could be severed at any moment and recreated at will. This allowed our wandering species to move around and coalesce in groups independently of their immediate kin and native surroundings. It enabled humans to create larger groups as well (Maryanski 1994).

In evolutionary terms this makes a lot of sense, but it remains however a hypothetical construct. Ethnography and, I should add, simple observation of daily behavior everywhere tend to give credibility’ to this view of human life. This is how people organize a great deal of their social activities in a modern urban environment like Manila; the *barkada* (cliques, informal social gangs, groups of friends), street-corner gangs, the clubs, and the multifarious associations, both formal or informal, that engage peoples interest and participation are proof enough that our sociality rests in good part on something else other than kin groups or state institutions. People freely and frequently engage in, and disengage themselves from, bonds of companionship; enter and exit clubs and associations; and participate in a series of cliques and coteries throughout their lifetime.

An important point to make in relation to the notion of weak ties (in the sense I am using) is, paradoxically, their emotional strength. Friendship and love are intense emotions, but what makes them sociologically strong and permanent are formal institutions such as marriage or common membership in a group. Marriage as we know it is an institution, and love is an emotion, and the two are not commensurate as so many works of fiction since *Romeo and Juliet* testify. Humans are volatile creatures, and any association resting only on personal ties needs to be constantly reactivated through interaction of its members, with the inevitable result of splits, fractures, and realignments. In other words anarchy is complex, and its complexity stems from the number of mental and emotional variables that

need to be adjusted, fine-tuned, and organized in order to create any durable group action. In the absence of any strict enforcement and coercive apparatus, it is then a *wealth* of weak ties and their constant *reactivation* through interaction that enable humans to stay together for any length of time and cooperate efficiently on the long run. Communities that cooperate and live together for any length of time on the sole basis of weak ties put a premium on the maintenance and reinforcement of such ties. They have therefore devised moral and behavioral devices—otherwise called “values”—with a view precisely to activate, facilitate, and promote felicitous conditions for person-to-person interaction.

It so happens that this kind of sociality has attracted the attention of sociologists and anthropologists, and in the Philippines most notably those of the IPC-Ateneo School.<sup>9</sup> Two of its main proponents were the late Frank Lynch (Yengoyan and Makil 1984) and Mary Racelis Hollnsteiner (1975). They thought of Philippine culture as based at least in part, if not in great part, on such vernacular notions as pakikisama, “smooth interpersonal relations” or SIR, utang na loob, *amor propio*, *hiyd*, and others. In the following section I shall consider some of these traits or value orientations as just what enables weak ties to acquire enough density and efficiency to enable people to form semistable aggregates in an anarchic open-aggregated situation.

The IPC-Ateneo School developed in the 1960s and 1970s an array of notions that made sense of the social and cultural

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<sup>9</sup> By the “IPC-Ateneo School” I refer to a group of social scientists who more or less loosely collaborated in the 1960s and 1970s, but not all necessarily members of the Institute of Philippine Culture (IPC) or part of the faculty of the Ateneo de Manila University (such as F. L. Jocano [1992]), but who were part of a current whose main exponents were located in Ateneo and the IPC. The three-volume *Society, Culture, and the Filipino*, edited by Mary Racelis Hollnsteiner (1975c), sums up this collective research work and its spirit

good picture from Spanish chronicles of the courts and principalities in the Visayas and Luzon, where hierarchies were well developed and slavery was both the main source of wealth and the main device for discriminating statuses between those who had slaves and those who did not (Scott 1983). However, the polities where powerful datus or sultans held sway and where an aristocracy and a lower class of commoners were finely distinguished in rank were tiny islands of stateship in a sea of largely uncontrolled populations inhabiting large tracts of forest and mountainous areas that were beyond the pale of any state. We know of course much less of the people called *remontados* and considered as savages and uncivilized brutes, although they formed a major section of the entire population of the archipelago.

The situation availing in the archipelago could thus be summarized as a dynamic of small trading and slaving cores alternately attracting and repelling a larger population of slash-and-burn farmers, forest collectors, and hunters and gatherers living in dispersed settlements in a condition of anarchy. Moreover, the culture of the Southeast Asian state—and the Philippines was no exception—could itself be characterized as partly anarchic because its structure was loose and rested on a competition between kin groups for power in the form of dependants (Reid 1988, 120).<sup>15</sup>

Colonial societies reorganized most of the communities they were able to subdue (sultanates in the south and Cordillera highlanders mounted a successful resistance) into a large peasantry dominated by a bureaucracy of clerics and monitored by the colonial administration located in urban centers. Commerce and the emergence of a lucrative slave market in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries created opportunities for independent trading centers to prosper both inside and outside of

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<sup>15</sup> “Society was held together more by personalistic patron-client ties of obligation than by legal/ bureaucratic structures” (Reid 2009).

ideological transformation. The instrument of this transformation was of course Christianity. I will not pursue this question here because I have done so in another essay (Macdonald 2004), but I will look at another aspect of the value system imposed on lowland Filipinos, which is completely consistent with the ranking order of a stratified colonial society.<sup>12</sup>

When the Spaniards set foot in the archipelago there were at least three main kinds of social formations: scattered tribal people with very weak leadership (or none at all, i.e., “anarchic”<sup>13</sup>), petty states (sultanates with a strong incipient hierarchy and an economic system based on trade and slavery), and highland societies of the Grand Cordillera in northern Luzon.<sup>14</sup> One must remember that states were rather few in number and had a very poor control of the hinterland. We have a rather

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<sup>12</sup> The situation is more complex, of course, than a simple contrast between a homogeneous indigenous population, on the one hand, and a colonial social system, on the other. Indigenous Philippine populations were diverse, and some (at least among those we know about) had a ranking system, a datu-based organization, slaves, and an incipient state apparatus (Scott 1994), but a large amount of people lived in loose unstructured communities based on the principle of fellowships. We know it because a number of present actual populations live like that and did not invent this way of life in the past one hundred years.

<sup>13</sup> I have developed a preliminary theory of anarchic societies in Southeast Asia before James Scott (2009, italics added) published his volume with the subtitle “An *Anarchist* History of Upland Southeast Asia.” His insights into the dynamics of state and nonstate societies in the region in many ways support and agree with my own views. My approach, which is partially exemplified in this article, is somewhat different but complementary to Scott’s views, inasmuch as I am looking for endogenous reasons to prefer anarchy or a nonstate form of organization, rather than mainly looking at nonstate space as a refuge and an escape solution against the ills brought by the state, such as tyranny, famine, poverty, war, and epidemics.

<sup>14</sup> It is crucial not to confuse two types of social formations or community structures: those that are anarchic (Buid, Teduray, Palawan, and others) and those that are partly structured along the principles of rank, wealth, and power (Ifugao, Kalinga, Manobo, and others). To lump both kinds of social forms into the same one-size-fits-all notion of “indigenous” or “tribal” groups is in my view a major mistake.

behavior of the Filipino. Taking their cues from a culture and personality approach, such as developed by Clyde Kluckhohn, and relying on a psychological approach to understanding society, Lynch (1975) and his collaborators studied the Filipino value system. By “value” they meant something that is half-way between a “social rule” and a “moral principle,” therefore bridging the gap between society and culture, the individual and the collective, ethics and psychology). The culture and personality school of thought seems out of date and obsolete, but the study of explicit norms of conduct remains an ethnographically worthwhile endeavor as most of these values are phrased in the vernacular and are “emic” or relevant to what members of the culture themselves think and feel (or what they thought and felt at the time of the study). Whether “values” cause people to act this way or that way remains to be seen, but in any case they give meaning to what they do.<sup>10</sup>

Pakikisama is such a “value.” It is a Tagalog word I would gloss as “a disposition for togetherness.”<sup>11</sup> It is partly synonymous with Lynch’s (1984, 31) concept of SIR. The notion of pakikisama encompasses a number of dispositions conducive to a state of felicity in interpersonal relations, namely, acceptance of the other person’s opinion, a degree of humility or self-effacement, a nonconfrontational stance, courtesy of manners (*galang*, see Kikuchi 1991, 38), gentle and indirect speech, and so on (Lynch 1984, 32–33). In another essay I have outlined

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<sup>10</sup> These values inform what can be called an “indigenous model.” Jorcano (1992, 7) defines such an indigenous and subconscious model of behavior as: ‘embedded in the deeper strata of our individual and collective subconscious... it serves as the framework of local ways of thinking, believing, feeling and acting outside the formal environment of the bureaucracy and the corporate organizations.’

<sup>11</sup> *Pakikisama* is defined as “*pakikibagay sa ugali ng ibawith pakikipagkapuwa* as synonym (“*pagpapakita ng kabutihan sa kapwa*”) (*New Illustrated Filipino-Filipino with English Dictionary* 2007, s.v. “pakikisama”). Zialcita (2005, 62) defines it as ‘oneness with other.’ Central to the definition of pakikisama is the notion of fellow or neighbor (*kapwa*).

strategies of interpersonal relation conducive to what I call “conditions of felicity” in collective life (Macdonald in press). The pakikisama rules of conduct clearly belong to this kind of strategy. In a tribal, anarchic, egalitarian, open-aggregated context, this strategy’ is central to the deployment of cooperative activities and the existence of cohesive and durable aggregates. But in rural and urban communities we face an altogether different proposition. Whereas a pakikisama strategy supports the egalitarian way of life of indigenous anarchies, in a stratified class society’ it runs counter to the hierarchical aspect of social structure and has a leveling effect by preventing individuals from rising above others. What then could be its function in a modern, urban or rural, setting fraught with strong ranking and a pervasive sense of inequality, and where social institutions are dependent upon a state apparatus and not on the strength of personal sentiments?

First of all SIR is linked with other values, particularly *hiya* (social embarrassment, loss of face, shame) which is most salient. One of the defining features of pakikisama is the rule of “reciprocal humility” that people *of the same rank* must obey. Racelis Hollnsteiner (1975b, 100) describes that very clearly within a context of class distinction: one who “acts big” (*nagmamalaki*), who is arrogant, boastful, and pretends to a status of equality with superiors which he or she does not deserve is brought down to size by public opinion. The pakikisama strategy is then a subtle game of positioning oneself in a strict relation of equality with one’s partners while respecting the overall social hierarchy.

Analyzing social or cultural values as the IPC-Ateneo School did meets a major problem, one that the proponents of this school might not have considered properly. The entire strategy of pakikisama is geared toward creating equality and a mood of fraternal companionship between social actors. It is also geared toward not going against the basically unequal structure of modern or traditional society, with its landlords, bosses, *amo*,

patrons, *padres*, and numerous other petty tyrants that fill the life of the common *tao*. If there is a dialectical contradiction anywhere, there is one here. The entire value system described so far is meant to create equality but operates in an unequal society.

I propose to look at this ongoing collective effort to sustain equality in a colonial and postcolonial society as a deeply anarchic dimension in the culture of the Filipino people, one that has its roots not only in a general aptitude of human beings for this particular kind of gregarious, peaceful, and egalitarian way of life, but also in a dwindling number of still wonderfully active indigenous communities in this part of Southeast Asia. I propose also to reconsider some of the so-called “values” in the light of the profound transformation brought about by colonialism, westernization, capitalism, and a world order that is inherently and essentially premised on inequality, in spite of the democratic struggle toward equalization.

## Sharing, Colonialism, and *Utang na Loob*

History brought to the shores of these happy and peaceful islands one of the most bellicose, fanatical, and oppressive social systems on earth, the sixteenth-century Catholic Hispanic empire. It so profoundly transformed indigenous communities (while not exterminating them by the most cruel means as it did in the Americas) that what ensued was a completely new situation. Indigenous people—the entire population of the Philippines at the time—either successfully resisted (most notably the so-called Moros and Igorot) or hid somewhere in mountainous areas or remote islands of the archipelago. The rest were forcibly constrained by a brutal social order specifically devised to exploit the land and the work of its people to enrich the imperial treasury and a class of landlords. By the same token, the colonized people had to be subjected to a profound