

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Farming Families in Malaysia and the Philippines: Empirical Works and Classical Debates

Veronica L. Gregorio  
National University of Singapore  
v.gregorio@u.nus.edu

**Abstract:** Family studies is a developing field in Southeast Asia. Scholars attempt to touch on family relations as they cover issues on national identity, state policies, gender division of labor, migration, agriculture, and modernization. It is important to give particular focus on the farming families in the region because, of all types of families, they are the ones who face and adapt to most changes in political, economic, cultural, and social terms. By reviewing literatures done in relation to farming families in Malaysia and the Philippines, this paper argues for the importance of (1) acknowledging the convergence in the definition and usage of the terms “family” and “kinship” in studying different forms of families, (2) exploring contemporary sociocultural perceptions on the family farm, and (3) ensuring that scholarly works go beyond focusing on development approaches and wife-husband dyad relations. Towards the conclusion, this work highlights the possibility of exploring Geertz and Ellen’s ecological approach in studying the role of the land in the strengthening or weakening of family relations. It also recommends Agarwal’s bargaining approach be extended to Southeast Asia and that siblingship and generational positionalities be considered.

**Keywords:** development, family, farm life, Malaysia, Philippines

Scholarly works that explore the dynamics within and characteristics of families were done during the late 19th century primarily by Western scholars and practitioners in the field of anthropology, sociology, and clinical psychology. Anthropologist Lewis Morgan pioneered the foundational works that established the family as a unit of analysis, the *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1871) and *Ancient society* (1877). Using comparative ethnographic accounts for the first work, Morgan (1871) provided terminologies for linguistic classification between families from native North America, Asia, Central Europe, and

North Africa. In the second work, Morgan (1877) argued for a unilinear development of the family, based in Greece and Rome, which in brief starts from no organization to having marriage-classes. Clans from marriages were overthrown as private property emerged and the state was established. Moreover, in the same work, Morgan identified five types of families: consanguine, punaluan, syndyasmian (pairing family), patriarchal, and monogamian. Morgan’s work influenced Karl Marx’s analysis on gender and family. Friedrich Engels (1902) re-echoed Marx’s notes in the book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* which focused on

the patriarchal family and its development towards a monogamous one.

Sociologists Ernest Groves and William Ogburn, using statistical analysis of census reports about marriage and divorce, published the *American Marriage and Family Relationships* in 1928. They identified in this work the importance of family clinics and counseling in preventing family troubles and achieving successful marriages (Goodsell, 1929). Following this, Ogburn and Tibbitts (1933) wrote on the American family's well-defined functions which include affectional, economic, recreational, protective, religious, and educational.

Other anthropological works on the family were done around the same period. These include Ralph Linton's (1936) *The Study of Man* and George Murdock's (1949) *Social Structure*, which proposed varying models of families based on a comparative and cross-cultural survey in native North and South America, Africa, Oceania, and Eurasia. Linton (1936) suggested that there are two general divisions of families—conjugal and consanguineal. Murdock (1949) argued for the universality and primacy of the nuclear families over extended families. The latter further posited that the nuclear family has four main tasks in the society which includes sexual, economic, reproductive, and educational. Despite being criticized due to their functionalist definitions (Gittins, 1993), these initial works in Anthropology and Sociology have been immensely useful as a starting point for scholars in other fields to question how the global social and cultural changes affect the family and vice-versa.

As for clinical psychology, the transition to study the mental health of individuals towards families gave way to the family therapy movement in the 1960s. The major conceptual framework used in this field is the family systems theory pioneered by Murray Bowen. The theory infers that individuals should be seen and understood in relation to their families. He stated that,

The mother–child relationship is an influential factor in the development of the child's self but it is always thought of as one amongst multiple influential relationships and factors within the context of the child's nuclear, extended, and multigenerational family system. (Palombi, 2016, p. 329)

In the succeeding decades, family studies, which generally refer to all research on families in any discipline, further developed as feminist movements and scholars started to question the solid unitary conceptualizations (Ferree, 1990) and normative sex role arrangements (Fox, 2015) within families that earlier studies seem to be promoting. Feminists called for the inclusion of “subjectivity, reflexivity, and intersectionality” (Walker, 2009) in family studies. That being said, themes such as recognition of the housewife's unpaid work, the occurrence of violence within the home, women's well-being, among many others started to emerge. At present, the field is covered in, but not limited to, history, demography, economics, social work, communication, and non-clinical psychology.

Drawing on the discussions of the units of analysis, empirical works, and theoretical approaches, this paper argues for the importance of (1) acknowledging the convergence in the definition and usage of the terms “family” and “kinship” in studying different forms of families, (2) exploring contemporary sociocultural perceptions on the family form, and (3) ensuring that scholarly works go beyond focusing on development approaches and dyad relations.

### Reviewing the Unit of Analysis in Family Studies

“The family represents an active principle. It is never stationary, but advances from a lower to a higher form as society advances from a lower to higher condition... systems of consanguinity, on the contrary are passive... It changes only when the family radically changed.”

(Morgan, 1871, as cited in Engels, 1902, p. 60)

From the above quote, the definition of family is seen as dynamic whereas consanguineal kinship system (based on blood) is identified as almost unchanging. Family and kinship are the most used units of analysis when examining families in the fields of social sciences. In statistical terms, however, family patterns or behaviors are studied through the household unit. These three terms are sometimes interchangeably used. That being said, I find that presenting the development

and usage of these terms are key in understanding the current trends in family studies.

### ***Deconstruction of Family***

Family comes from ancient-Italian word *famulus*, which means servant or slave in the house. It refers to someone who is deemed as a property of the house owners, which shows economic and social relations (Brown, 2012). The classic understanding is, however, biological as it identifies the family as the smallest social unit in a human society consisting of husband, wife, and their children (Idani, 2014). According to Lesthaeghe (2010), the definition of family improved during the Second Demographic Transition in the 1970s when socio-cultural changes such as increase of women's participation in waged work (Tsurumi, 1999), development and usage of contraception (Benagiano, Bastianelli, & Farris, 2007; Craig, 2013), and deinstitutionalization of marriages (Cherlin, 2004) altered the classic family structure. The latter is composed of individualized marriage in pursuit of the couple's happiness or the conception of true love; not based on the family's choice or preferences. Marriage is seen as a private relationship between two individuals which is opposite of social marriage that is geared towards political and economic gains for the merging families. It continues to get modified as issues of adoption, same-sex marriages, single parenthood, and assisted reproductive technology were brought up, mostly by Western societies (Carsten, 2004; Therborn, 2004).

At present, *family* is defined more precisely as a social institution with established systems of behavior among its blood-related and legally recognized members. Classifications of the family are still highly based on its structure. This includes nuclear or conjugal (wife, husband, and child/ren), single, extended (nuclear family combined with the wife or husband's family of origin; extended family can be just from the parents' generation (siblings) or can also include their own parents, which will make the extended family a multi-generational one), single parent with child/ren, childless couple, and transnational families (Therborn, 2004). It is no longer about strictly having both parents or being together in one location/residence. In the postmodern context, one can consider anyone as family irrespective of gender or blood (Stacey, 1998) or proximity or even actual being. The discourse argues that there is no one definition of family; that

the family is fluid and open to deconstruction. Some examples of postmodern families are friends who live and consider each other as siblings or a couple who chose to have no kids but adopts a pet and treats it as their own child.

### ***Webs and Changes Within Kinship***

Contrary to the historical origin of the family, understanding of kinship stems and revolves around relatedness with each other. Anthropologist Roger Keesing (1975) defined kinship as the "relationship based on or modeled on the culturally recognized connection between parents and children (and extended to siblings and through parents to more distant relatives)" (p. 150). Diversity in marriage practices and clan/tribe organizations in both religious and political dimensions are found within the study of kinship (Carsten, 2016; Dube, 1994). Typologies vary according, but not limited, to the bond (affinal or consanguineal), residence pattern (matrilocal, patrilocal, ambilocal, natolocal, avunculocal, or neolocal), descent (patrilineal, matrilineal, or cognatic), and marriage customs (monogamy, polygyny, or polyandry; for detailed descriptions see Parkin & Stone, 2004; Stone, 2000). Although it seems that these typologies are given and unchanging, anthropologists have argued that kinship is also made and performed (Carsten, 2004; Sahlins, 2013; Van Vleet, 2008). Fictive kinship, for instance, can be found in godparenthood among Christians and in milk-kinship among Muslims. In various cultural settings, similar rituals that recognize a non-blood relative as kin entails long-term loyalty and solidarity (Leyton, 2009).

Carsten (2004) discussed how the study of kinship can be historically divided into two. The *traditionalists* tend to focus on established topics which include descent, lineage, inheritance and alliance, among others. The *revisionists* bring in new forms of kinship based on reproductive technologies like artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization. Carsten posited that the boundary between biological and social kinship is continuously being challenged by new technologies.

### ***Understanding the Household Unit***

Among the terms being discussed, *household* has the most pronounced characterization as given by demographers and economists. The United Nations (1982) defined it as a socio-economic unit consisting

of an individual or group of people who live together. A household can be seen as literally the physical house. It can be composed of people who are not related by blood, or even by just one person living alone providing for his or her own needs. People who stay in one household can have their individual or collective food arrangements. Some examples are seasonal farm workers in housing quarters, students in dormitories or hostels, and soldiers in military camps.

One household can be composed of a nuclear family, an extended family, or a family with a non-family such as domestic helpers or personal drivers. Although it seems easy to understand the household, scholars have put the definition into question as it assumes that every household has a determined and common understanding of household head (Geiselhart, 2018; Randall, Coast, & Leone, 2011). In a housing quarter, dormitory, or camp, it is understandable that there is an assigned head or leader who oversees other members, but things are more complex within households in different cultural settings.

### ***Family or Kinship or Household?***

The development and possible improvements on the definition of the household are important, but based on the discussion, family and kinship have more similar theoretical trajectories. Postmodern families are similar to fictive kinship in some sense. In addition, family studies, although mostly found in Western societies, also covers topics that are related to kinship, especially from the revisionist side. Having established that, I argue that the convergence in the definition and usage of the terms family and kinship should be acknowledged. It is important to accept that there is an increase of openness between the two to borrow or adopt related concepts and re-think and re-work its meaning. In other words, the academic discourse can no longer be limited to choices between family or kinship, biological or social, modern or exotic, and West or non-West (Carsten, 2004, p. 189).

Following the said argument and for purposes of consistency, family will be used in the succeeding sections. Family will be defined here as “small group of people linked by culturally recognized ties of marriage or similar forms of partnerships, decent, and/or adoption, who typically share a household for some period of time” (Maynes & Waltner, 2012).

## **Farming Families in Southeast Asia**

The rise of family studies centers and institutions in American and European regions shows its growing importance. Topics in the said field generally vary from postmodern families (Irvine & Cilia, 2017), cohabiting couples (Holland, 2017; Perelli-Harris, Berrington, Sánchez Gassen, Galezewska, & Holland, 2017), interracial marriages (Caballero & Aspinall, 2018), parenting styles (Cowan, 2018; Mowen & Schroeder, 2018), to assisted reproductive technology (Heidt-Forsythe, 2018; Leibetseder & Griffin, 2018). It is worth taking note that this trend is not totally in contrast but still distinctive from most topics in Southeast Asia which cover national identity, state policies, gender division of labor, migration, agriculture, and modernization (Hayami, 2012; King & Wilder, 2003). Aside from the discourse itself, another factor to take note in the region is that the flow of foreign scholars has continued after the world war and the introduction of research tradition (studying abroad and analyzing one’s own country, teaching new set of students in local universities) developed local scholars in the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand (Quah, 2008). In this section, I will present classic and recent (from 2000–2017) empirical studies about farming families in Malaysia and the Philippines.

Malaysia and the Philippines are chosen as the foci of this study not just because of their common features (agricultural economy, climate conditions, colonial history, modernization programs, bilateral family system, to name a few), but due to their contradictions which make them stand out among the rest of the countries mentioned by Quah previously. Geographically, Malaysia is part of the region’s mainland whereas the Philippines is one of the island nations. In terms of religious practices, majority of the population in Malaysia are Muslims whereas the Philippines are composed of mostly Roman Catholics. As regards to ethnic groups, half of the Malaysian population are Malay and the rest are Chinese, Indians, and others (Saari, Rahman, Hassan, & Habibullah 2016; Yeung, Desai, & Jones, 2018). In the Philippines, the population is composed of diverse indigenous minorities which “consist of a large number of tribal groups who are the descendants of original inhabitants of the country” and small Filipino-Chinese communities (Boquet, 2017, p. 168). The countries’ political structures also differ as Malaysia has a federal constitutional monarchy, whereas the Philippines has a democratic republic. Largely, these differences alongside the commonalities make an interesting case for studying farming families in Southeast Asia.

### ***Keluarga Petani in Malaysia***

Malaysian government efforts gave rise to the modernization of agriculture, particularly in “developing comprehensive innovation and research and development (R&D) infrastructures” in selected areas in the country (Islam & Siwar, 2012). Ultimately, the country aims to be the world leader in these areas as they prioritize places where they would have a competitive advantage and intrinsic natural assets. As the sector is the major source of raw products for domestic consumption, it contributes largely to society by giving employment to Malaysian residents, particularly those in the rural areas (Rozhan, 2015) and by making the Malaysian economy as one of the most open and integrated in the world. Before presenting the current studies on farming families in Malaysia, I will first provide a summary of the earlier works done by Michael Swift, Syed Husin Ali, Maila Stivens, and Janet Carsten.

In his book, *Malay peasant society in Jelebu*, Michael Swift (1965) analyzed how traditional social structures changed as modern government administration was introduced to the village. He concluded that the political influence and right to the ancestral land of the clan chief and matrilineal kin was transferred to the state, which reinforced commercial agriculture and economic differentiation. He noted how new types of groups such as landlords, the political elite, and landless laborers emerged in the village (Goethals, 1968; King & Wilder, 2003, p. 164). Similarly, *Social stratification in Kampung Bagan* by Syed Husin Ali (1964) also presented how relationships between Malay families changed as the state implements uneven land distribution. He showed how tensions between landlords and tenants arise and how English language education by wealthy families further improve their lifestyle (1964, pp. 107–119, 137). Although both scholars did not directly argue about the relations within families, they have presented how the Malay matrilineal farming family as a unit was vastly influenced by the changing socio-economic context and political structures.

To focus further on gender and family relations, I refer to the works of Maila Stivens and Janet Carsten. In Stivens’ (1996) *Matrilineity and Modernity*, she explained how the pre-colonial logic of rights to land, which is based on its continued use and transmission

from mother to daughter, changed from family-based to individualized ownership as tenure system was implemented during the British rule (pp. 53, 64–68). Furthermore, she showed how the formation of nuclear families (from being extended) and young family member’s search for privacy (own rooms/space) are related to both young men and women’s entry to the labor market and acquisition of properties (pp. 226–230). Overall, Stivens argued that “gender relations are integral in the transformations of Rembau social structure and practices historically” (1996, p. 249) where she pointed out that although capitalist penetration in the village seemed unfavorable to women, it actually provided some social advantages. Some examples that she provided are land ownership, selection of own spouse, and working outside the village.

Carsten’s (1997) work, *The Heat of the Hearth*, focused on siblingship, the formation of kinship through shared substance, and inter-generational affinities in Sungai Cantik in Langkawi Island. She argued that “the evocative power of siblingship is bound up with the association made between the house and the sibling group” (1997, p. 82). Carsten presented how this relationship is, however, challenged when siblings grow and separate their own ways to build families. The partitioning of the property whether formal or informal, particularly the family land, disrupts the ties among siblings (p. 96). She further argued in the succeeding chapters how substances, given or acquired, such as blood, food (rice), and breast milk develops siblingship whereas the birth of grandchildren makes a link between two sets of grandparents more visible. Towards the end of her work, she called for a redefinition of kinship as a process of becoming related to one another.

The role of the land, its state-led distribution, individual ownership, and symbol of unity among siblings were all covered in the abovementioned studies. The last two are more detailed and specific in showing how analyzing family relations cannot be separated from that of gender relations. It is, however, important to take note that although Swift and Stiven’s works discussed matrilineality in Malaysia, the country predominantly follows a bilateral lineage system. This is despite having Islam as a dominant religion which is patrilineal in nature. Now we move to more recent studies to identify how the relations among farming families are being examined.

### ***Labor Patterns***

Although the labor supply of a married woman varies throughout her lifetime, the trend is that a married woman continues to decrease the amount of work as she approaches her child-bearing and child-rearing years. The result is, however, different in Amin's (2003) work. She used the Malaysian Family Life Surveys to identify whether married women's employment and earnings create a life-cycle pattern and whether the income of married women equalizes family income inequalities. Using a quantitative method, she concluded that women from farming families actually have an increase in employment after their child-rearing years. It was, however, not explained if the result is due to the childcare assistance provided by extended family members or egalitarian practice in childcare. In a similar vein, Kaur (2000) characterized in his work the case of women from farming families and how they become part of an industrialized global conveyor belt. It mentioned how Western cultural notions affect the conceptions of men and women, as well as the creation of categories of women-only jobs, and how work in itself became a "bearer of gender." The author contended that the predominant reason for employing women is economic. Most cheap labor and manufacturing processes require repetitive work which implies high levels of accuracy, manual dexterity, and "light touch"; others counter, however, that the contributing factors are women's "nature," including their psychological make-up, passivity, controllability, and capacity for hard work. In sum, the use of the political and economic instruments by the government has eroded the identification of race with the occupation, but the gendered division in the country remains to relegate women into the cheapest of ranks and the most abundant resource for foreign capital.

### ***Agrarian Changes***

Hew (2011) examined the agrarian transition and rural transformation that occurred in Sarawak, Borneo. The consequences of rapid changes have seriously penetrated the indigenous communities, and even more, unevenly. Hew argued that the processes that transpired are gendered as its effects include either men or women leaving alone or with their families or staying put in their communities. In the event that a married woman leaves, the structure of farming communities has been found to change both in terms of agricultural practices, the family structure, and inheritance. In terms

of mothers and daughters, those living near each other are able to provide mutual support, but those separated by great distances become more vulnerable. Similarly, in a study on farming families in oil palm plantations of Carey Island, Wan (2011) showed the critical aspects of livelihood strategies of villagers in the actual transition from being forest resources-dependent to being wage laborers in the nearby large oil palm holdings. The jobs in plantations highly prioritized physical strength which marginalized women's contribution but favored men's participation, making women's sense of belonging to oil palm plantations as not so strong. Such also brought about differences in inheritance practices, which increasingly favored sons over daughters. In addition, women seemed to have lost their roles in decision-making especially in the management of small-scale farms. Wan (2011) concluded that all factors have reinforced the gender division of labor in the local economy.

### ***Youth Perceptions***

As Malaysia continues to rely on its agricultural sector to ease its way into development, contract farming has been rising as one of the potential activities that would provide profit maximization, especially for farming communities. Although not focused on farming families as a unit per se, D'Silva et al. (2010) problematized the attitude of the Malaysian youth towards contract farming. The authors employed a quantitative study using a sample of 400 undergraduate students. The results show that most of the respondents showed a positive attitude towards contract farming. In the same study, Shaffril, D'Silva, Uli, & Abu Samah (2010) mainly asked whether males and females have differences toward contract farming in terms of its acceptance, attitude, and knowledge. Results showed that both males and females had equal levels of acceptance, attitude, and knowledge towards contract farming. With the data at hand, Shaffril et al. (2010) argued that contract farming has a large potential in attracting the youth to be a part of the agricultural community. Thus, to make this a reality, the authors posited that there is a need for more promotion, exposure, and information on contract farming not just by civil society groups but also by government agencies in the country.

Aside from literatures that discuss farming families in the context of industrialized labor patterns, agrarian transitions, and youth perception on farming, there have

also been studies which include labor in the context of outmigration (Kelly, 2013; Mueller, Kovarik, Sproule, & Quisumbing, 2015), empowerment of women farmers through entrepreneurial skills development (Al Mamun, Muniady, Yukthamarani, Binti, & Mohamad, 2016; Chee, 2007), and family attitude on urban agriculture (Shamsudin, Rezai, & Teng, 2014). After consideration of these works, we now turn to studies involving farming families in the Philippines.

### ***Pamilyang Magsasaka in the Philippines***

To address the issues of food security and rural poverty, the Philippine government during the Marcos dictatorship in the 1970s, turned its attention to agricultural development. Along with supporting research and development in agricultural technology, an effort was also made to develop the market for, and infrastructure of local agriculture (Roa, 2007, p. 59). Programs related to advancing the sector were continued by the succeeding government. By 2002, the Philippines was the first country in the ASEAN to allow the cultivation of genetically modified corn (Felix, 2004). Presently, there is a wide array of policies related to land ownership, seed production, and mechanization of agriculture. Just like the previous section, selected classic and contemporary studies about farming families will also be presented here. The works of Felipe Landa Jocano, Gelia Castillo, James Eder, and Agnes Quisumbing are discussed below.

Filipino anthropologist Felipe Landa Jocano (1969) wrote one of the earliest works about the education and belief system in a farming village in Panay Island. In his book, *Growing Up in a Philippine Barrio*, he described the limited access to formal education but focused mainly on how informal education is provided to children in various ways. He explained how parents and neighbors introduce children to their cultural beliefs and practices in relation to the supernatural world. Jocano (1969) showed how values and sanctions are taught in different levels of social relations, from the nuclear to extended family members and community level. A more detailed study about family relations was done by Gelia Castillo (1979), a Filipino rural sociologist, in her work *Beyond Manila: Philippine Rural Problems in Perspective*. Castillo's study exhausts literature covering all regions in the country and used mixed methods in Philippine data to complete her 12-chapter book. Chapters 5 to 7 are

of specific interest as it discussed, in particular, the farming family as a microworld, the Filipino woman and her multiple roles, and the rural youth as the face of the future. The family was described as a mirror of the Philippine society, mostly extended, and a source of social stability. It was shown in her study that two-thirds of Filipino women can be found in villages doing farm work, and are neither subservient to or dominating of the husband. On the other hand, most of the rural youth are found to be unpaid family laborers, to have pronounced consciousness on the importance of education, and to have a belief that Manila as a desirable place which offers more opportunities. To conclude her work, Castillo pointed out that Manila is not the Philippines. This is because the majority of Filipinos can be found in farming villages (p. 251), not in cities. She highlighted how farmers give importance to owning farmland and the misery of being called squatter in a land that one used to work on. To end, the work calls for government allocation of time and resources for rural development (Castillo, 1979).

Two decades after the works of Jocano and Castillo, James Eder (1993) published "Farming Family and Household Enterprise in a Philippine Community" based on his fieldwork in San Jose, Palawan. He highlighted in this work the "juxtaposition of the notions of proletarianization of labor force and persistence of family farming" (p. 648) and discussed the importance of considering the family members and their responses to such diverse economic changes. Eder argued that family farms persist because of the increasing non-farm work of each individual family member. By looking at the demographic composition of the community, he concluded that population growth and capitalist development are key factors to the survivability of family farms. The differences in the non-farm work between husbands and wives and migrant and non-migrant families are also presented. He concluded that partial reliance on non-farm work has made family farming more attractive as the two complement each other. For example, paid motorcycle services alternatively serve as a mode of delivery from the farm to the market. Eder (1993), therefore, posited that it is important to look in the persistence not just of farming but also of self-employment, family structure, and household-based enterprises.

Whereas Eder's work covers gender differences between husbands and wives, Agnes Quisumbing's (1993) study is between different generations.

Published in the same year, “Intergenerational Transfers in Philippines Villages” analyzed five villages in the Philippines and focused on the parents’ inheritance decisions (land and non-land assets) and allocation of wealth through education. Using survey data, Quisumbing analyzed family differences in the transfers from one generation to another. Her findings based on parental allocation models showed that in terms of education and properties, better-educated fathers prioritize sons whereas better-educated mothers prioritize daughters. There is a difference, however, as the family becomes wealthier, both parents invest more on the daughter’s education whereas the land is preferentially given to the sons. In the end, Quisumbing concluded that daughters are at a disadvantage when it comes to intra-family and intergenerational transfers. She called for the inclusion of more comparable units of measurement on human capital related to the land and the returns of being educated.

Socialization by the family, adjustment to economic changes, gender differences, and generational transfers were all discussed in the four studies aforementioned. But are these themes still recurring for the past 10 years? What are the changes in the way scholars look at farming families? What are the similarities with the studies done in Malaysia? The next points will attempt to provide answers.

### ***Migration and Gender Identity***

As the Philippines continues to be the number one source of migrant workers not only in Southeast Asia but across the globe, migration is seen as one of the closest issues that affect Filipino families. This is especially relevant in this paper because most migrant workers are from agricultural provinces. McKay’s (2007) study drew on the narratives of Ifugao migrant women from farming villages and attempted to examine the creation and negotiation of identity that these women undertake. In her analysis, McKay found that an ethnicized, cultural, and class-based definition of a *Filipina* can be found in rural communities in the Philippines, a standard which most cannot meet. The ideals of *Filipina femininity* include the ideas of the self-sacrificing mother, the tolerant and obedient wife, the pale-skinned woman. The findings showed changes due to migration. Women with increased economic power are able to renegotiate their identities and roles within the family. One respondent remarked that her family prioritized

her education and that migration was a way for her to repay them. According to McKay (2007), migration helped her respondents in debt to reverse the situation, making them family and even community patrons. In a reverse setting, Lukasiewicz (2011) focused on the changes in gender roles and ideology of households where the principal males are the ones who migrate. The study was conducted in Lucban, Quezon Province, Philippines, among farming households. It was found that most of the left-behind women took on more managerial roles on the family farm, to the detriment of their other livelihoods and professions. Women invested the remittances received from their migrant spouses in agriculture, and other women purchased more land and expanded their production. It was also found that most of the women drew on an extended family network for support. Oftentimes, women would share or delegate management responsibility to male relatives. Lukasiewicz (2011) concluded that migration of principal males tends to push women into leadership roles on the farm.

### ***Rural Youth Participation.***

How do young people see their roles in the family farm? In the work of Manalo and van de Fliert (2013), the factors that influence the decision making of the young to participate in farming are explored. Their study took place in villages in Aurora and Albay provinces with participants aged from 13 to 21 years old, mostly high school and college students. It was observed that in most cases, participation was greater when the children were much younger. They found that 61 out of 68 participants have favorable views of agriculture. The factors that the study identifies are parental influence and education. They found that 30 of the participants’ parents did not encourage their children to involve themselves on the farm, left them out of discussions about farm management, or did not give weight to their children’s opinions. Although many participants wanted to migrate, Manalo and van de Fliert (2013) found that a large number were reluctant to sever all ties with farming. Some wished to return to their communities and contribute to farming, to buy land and employ their poorer relatives, or to invest in the agricultural production of their left-behind family members. In a whole different study but by the same author, Manalo (2013), he hypothesized a nexus between greater access to information and increased agricultural production. He looked into the



potential of “the youth” to act as infomediaries on behalf of their farming parents through information and communication technology (ICT). Qualitative methods such as time transects, mobility maps, and photo-voice were used in data gathering. It was found that the young respondents already had experience and are active with ICT usage, particularly cellphones and computers. Manalo (2013) concluded that given these circumstances, the younger population of farming communities could be mobilized to act as infomediaries for their older and less tech-savvy parents.

### ***Farming and Climate Change***

The Philippines’ second largest island, Mindanao, has been plagued by increasingly frequent weather disturbances and climate change through the past half-century or so. Bagsit, Suyo, Subade, and Basco (2014) conducted a study in Dumangas, Iloilo province through household surveys among farming and fishing communities, supplemented by focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews. One coping strategy was found to be more favored, or more likely to be undertaken by women: seeking out loans/credit after a calamity. However, further statistical analysis of the household survey data showed that there are no significant differences in the adaptation strategies preferred by men and women. This is at odds with a number of studies which assert that climate change induces gender differentiated coping strategies. The study also found that activities in anticipation of natural calamities are different among men and women. Men are more involved with community leaders and wait for announcements and weather forecasts, whereas women focused on ensuring the household’s physical and financial safety. The study concluded that government programs should encourage women’s involvement in disaster risk reduction management, through their involvement in training seminars and conferences.

To further zero in on the differences in adaptation due to climate change and to also consider that many areas in Mindanao are sites of civil and armed conflict, the study by Chandra, McNamara, Dargusch, Caspe, and Dalabajan (2017) examined the effects of both climate change and violent conflicts on smallholder families, highlighting gender differentiated impact. The study took place in barangays in Agusan del Norte, North Cotabato, and Sultan Kudarat. In-depth interviews and group discussions were used to gather data. Chandra et al. (2017) found that the

differences in the impact of climate change on female and male smallholder farmers could be traced to the gendered division of labor in the household. It was found that women, although responsible for child care and household maintenance, also contributed to the family’s income through a variety of non-farm occupations. Violent conflict was also found to disproportionately impact women and children. Female farmers, seemingly due to their knowledge of their own vulnerability, are reluctant to make any large scale or long-term investments as they needed to be highly mobile in anticipation of further conflict or weather disturbances.

Based on the pieces of literature provided, studies on husband and wife relations are still recurring in the Philippines, but there is a move towards the exploration of gender identities and ideology as influenced by migration. Further, intergenerational dynamics are continuously being explored but not just in terms of transfers but also of participation in farm work. Climate change in relation to agriculture is one of the themes that emerged which is not much-paid attention to before. With regards to similarities, youth issues are featured in both Malaysia and the Philippines.

### **Analytical Frames in Studying Farming Families**

As earlier mentioned, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists are the first to explore families at large. In narrowing down to farming families, economists then came into the picture. Writings go back to as far as Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Karl Kautsky, Alexander Chayanov, and Karl Polanyi (Karl Polanyi was an economic historian by training and was influenced by anthropological works of Bronislaw Malinowski. Polanyi’s major works are in the field of economic anthropology). One of the debates that arose from the works of Polanyi, Arensberg, and Pearson in farming economies is between the substantivists and formalists (Bryceson, Kay, & Mooij, 2000). The former is generally practiced in sociology and anthropology whereas the latter is more related to development economics.

In the next sub-sections, the ecological and bargaining approach in studying farming families will be presented. I chose the two as they are from both sides of the abovementioned debate. The ecological approach is leaning to the substantivist side which

defines substantive economy as based “from man’s dependence for his living upon nature and his fellows. It refers to the interchange with his natural and social environment, in so far as this results in supplying him with the means of material want satisfaction” (Polanyi et al., 1957, p. 243) On the other hand, the bargaining approach is more related on the formalist side which argues for the formal economy that is “from the logical character of the means–ends relationship, as apparent in such words as ‘economical’ or ‘economizing’. It refers to a definite situation of choice, namely, that between the different uses of means induced by an insufficiency of those means” (Polanyi et al., 1957, p. 243).

I find it significant to investigate both sides of the debate as farming families are constantly pressured to adapt towards “development” but at the same time are also described as “barrier to modernization” (Netting, 1993). They are seemingly sandwiched by the expected traditional values and bestowed modern practices based on the studies in the previous sections. They have been adapting to continuous economic and structural changes by combining activities (farm and non-farm work, migration) that are considered from both sides in order to survive. To further sharpen the theoretical lens on their situation, let us proceed with more detailed discussions.

### Ecological Approach

Although there are many works which applied ecological approach, I will focus on two studies conducted in Indonesia: *Agricultural Involution* by Clifford Geertz (1963) and *Environment, Subsistence, and System* by Roy Ellen (1982). Geertz and Ellen, both of whom are anthropologists, highlighted the advantages of using the concept of ecology which identifies the interdependencies between social relations, cultural practices, and environment (King & Wilder, 2003, p. 232).

According to Geertz (1963), the ecological approach “attempts to achieve a more exact specification of the relations between selected human activities, biological transactions, and physical processes by including them within a single analytical system, an ecosystem” (p. 3). He is quite critical of cultural ecology scholars like Julian Steward who focuses on cultural elements as the core of human and environmental relations whereas all other elements are seen as secondary. Geertz (1963)

differentiated his position from this as he argued for the importance of focusing on interrelationships and links between all possible elements, instead of studying just one. The specific example that he gave to explain his argument is about a flock of sheep in a pasture. Although the flock feeds on the grass, their manure enriches the soil and trees grow gradually. Coyotes, however, come to eat the young members of the flock, so the ranchers decide to kill them. As the number of coyotes decreased, the numbers of rabbits and field mice increased. The rodents are damaging the field crops; thus, the ranchers started poisoning them and stopped killing coyotes. In the end, coyotes cannot find rodents to consume, so they preyed more on the young members of the flock. He demonstrates that there is no specific determinant of human and environmental conditions because their relationships are influenced by diverse factors.

Throughout his work, Geertz (1963) presented the ecological history of the Indonesian agrarian economy, and also briefly mentioning ecological settings in Malaysia and the Philippines. He identified two ecosystems in his study: *swidden* (slash and burn) and *sawah* (irrigated rice or paddy field). Both are widely used in the pre-colonial period. In the colonial period, crops for export like coffee and sugar were produced through forced labor as Javanese farmers were barred from doing *swidden* and *sawah* agriculture in the “waste lands” (p. 80). The rise of corporate plantation systems in the 1900s began with the establishment of British companies and imposition of land use programs. Towards the end, Geertz (1963) compared the farming sectors in Indonesia and Japan. Geertz pointed out that even though both started as almost in the same conditions, population boom, government approaches, urbanization, and labor technique in the context of colonial and world war history has put the two countries in opposite directions.

Ellen’s (1982) work reechoed Geertz’s points on the usage of ecological approach; however, he preferred to describe it as a general ecological approach in contrast to Steward’s cultural ecological approach. He then listed down in his book the important characteristics of ecological approach: monism, complexity, connectivity and mutual causality, process, populations as analytical units, and frameworks for description. According to Ellen (1982), the said approach is first, monistic in a sense that it “explicitly seeks to analyze behavioral and environmental traits as part of a single system” (p. 75).

Second, it is complex because it rejects the convenient idea that culture and environment are two separate spheres. Third, it stresses the “two-way character of causality and avoids determinist-possibilist fallacy” (p. 76). In short, all elements in the ecosystem (humans, plants, soil, among others) are interdependent. Fourth, as described by Geertz, the approach focuses on “ecological and socio-ecological processes, and their system-wide repercussions” (p. 77).

This kind of emphasis allows the “analysis of single pattern of settlement or in comparing different ecologically defined populations” (Ellen, 1982, p. 78) such as farming communities or farming families, which brings us to the fifth characteristic which uses the populations as an analytical unit. Ecological populations are described as an aggregate of organisms having a common set of means and occupies the same settlement. Lastly, the ecological approach provides frameworks that bring ethnography as an alternative approach. Descriptive methods on the relationships in the ecosystem are used by both ecologists and geographers.

Ellen (1982) wrote his findings in great detail about ecosystems and subsistence patterns among farming communities. The practices on resource management used include food collection, hunting, fishing, horticulture, swiddening, animal husbandry, cultivation, pastoralism, and industrialism. It is, however, heavily technical when he explained about calculations on the differences between human energy and mechanical energy (see Chapters 6 and 7). At the end of the same work, Ellen (1982) argued that the ecological approach should be comprehended as a methodology and not a theory in itself. He clarified that the approach does not provide explanations of the phenomenon but instead suggests ways to explore it. Further, he posited that the analysis of the variables in the ecosystem can only make sense if social structures and systems will be included.

Both works by Geertz and Ellen are highly significant in examining farming families as they underscore the role of the environment, or to be more specific in this context, the family farm. The conception of an ecosystem is apt in agricultural societies where people depend their lives on the farm, may it be for consumption or export. It would be interesting to further look at how the approach will be in other Southeast Asian countries considering that climate change has been heavily affecting the ecosystem, mechanization

of agricultural processes has been increasing, and sociopolitical structures has been implementing more policies about land usage and rights.

On a different note, an important point of discussion that I also see about the ecological approach is Ellen’s take on it as methodological and not theoretical. It would be worthy to ask: how has the approach’s application changed through time? Factoring in its own development, can it now be considered as theoretical? The list of questions will go on, but in the meantime, I will move to discuss an approach which is from what Polanyi et al. (1957) called formalist side: the bargaining approach.

### **Bargaining Approach**

Household behaviors and decision-making processes are initially studied in economics using the unitary household model, which analyzes the household with the assumption that it is “a single unit, implying the existence of a single household welfare function reflecting the preferences of *all* its members” (Falkingham and Baschieri, 2009, p. 123) and that the family is under the leadership of the “authoritarian patriarch” (Mattila-Wiro, 1999). Criticisms on the unitary model gave way to the collective household models. Collective models highlight the intra-household dynamics and differences in the choices or priorities between household members. These collective models include the following: efficient cooperative, non-cooperative, combined, and bargaining (for detailed discussion, see Cherchye, De Rock, Lewbel, & Vermeulen, 2015; and Mattila-Wiro, 1999).

John Nash’s (1950) bargaining model acknowledges the presence of both conflict and cooperation between two interacting players. In bargaining, the two players can reach an agreement where both will be satisfied or a disagreement where one gains more through the losses of the other. By extending this approach, development economist Bina Agarwal (1997) suggested that analytical description of an unquantifiable aspect such as gender can be more useful in studying families. Instead of mathematical models, she uses sociological and anthropological studies to back up her arguments. Most of the examples that she gave are from farming families in South Asia.

Agarwal (1997) argued that the most important factor for bargaining within farming families is the ownership of and control over assets, especially

the arable land. The other factors include access to employment and other income-earning means, access to communal resources such as forest, support from non-government organizations and state, and the social factors that will be discussed here: social norms, social perceptions, and social costs. For Nash's (1950) model, bargaining power depends on an individual's fall-back position or threat point. It refers to options outside the game, in case the negotiation fails. Some examples of fall-back positions are inheritance and personal savings. In the bargaining approach proposed by Agarwal, she factors in social norms, social perceptions, and social costs in examining the bargaining power within families. To explain in her terms, the fall-back position in the family means that "the greater a person's ability to physically survive outside the family, the greater would be her/his bargaining power within the family" (Agarwal, 1997, p. 9).

In terms of social norms, Agarwal (1997) discussed how women's movement (waged work) outside the home is regulated as the labor market prioritizes male workers and the expectation for women to do childrearing is relatively strong. According to her, such limitations can be seen deliberately in policies, but most of the time, they are communicated in silence. For social perceptions, she explained how actual contributions of women in the household are perceived as less valuable and also how women's actual needs are dismissed and perceived as the same with collective family needs. Such undervaluation and underestimation reduce the woman's bargaining power in the family. Social costs, on the other hand, refer to the networks (kin, patronage, neighborhood, and friendships) that one can lose if she attempts to break the norms or contest to the perceptions. One example that Agarwal (1997) gave is about bargaining over the family land wherein a daughter's ability to successfully claim is dependent not just on laws but also on social legitimacy or acceptance of her siblings and community (p. 14).

Agarwal (1997) made interesting points about women's everyday covert resistance and survival strategies towards inequalities in the family, may it be about resource distribution or division of work. Studies in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan by Agarwal showed that women find ways to safeguard earnings (asking neighbors to keep it for them), strengthen social networks (buying gifts for in-laws), and show dismay to family members' unnecessary activities (intentionally

not making good food for husband's friends who visit to drink alcohol). Resistance is not openly expressed because it is a better long-term option, economically and socially, than divorce or exclusion. Towards the end of her work, she pointed out the important role of the institutional environment, market, community, and state, in the family relations and bargaining power of its members.

Overall, I find Agarwal's bargaining approach valuable in studying families. She provided a sharp distinction on the gender dynamics within families using important social dimensions. The challenge that I see in using the approach is that it tends to assume that someone in the family needs to be the "winner." The approach for example, in claiming the land, the "player" needs to please the kin and neighborhood to make them accept or think that she deserves it. If she does not succeed, she is the "loser." I find such tendency to put the family members into binaries problematic because it accepts that the automatic winner is the assumed male household head, which is the husband, whereas the wife needs to play harder to take the position. The analysis will, therefore, be different when applied in Southeast Asia because of the bilateral kinship systems that make women have higher status than those in the predominantly patrilineal South Asia.

Moreover, Agarwal (1997) suggested that intra-household coalitions be further looked into and that collective bargaining in institutional spaces be examined using qualitative analysis. For this point, she gave examples such as the coalition of wife and children opposing the husband/father and also the coalition of patrilocal kin against the non-kin wife. Although Agarwal did not elaborate much, it would be interesting to see how coalitions happen beyond the conjugal units and the generational aspect. Other possibilities could be the coalition of grandparents and grandchildren or coalition among siblings. Generation or age can be a useful analytical tool, especially in Southeast Asia where seniority or age is highly recognized more important than gender categories (Errington, 2016, p. 206). It is then important to note the context in which Agarwal used the bargaining approach and consider it carefully before applying to other regions. Given that the land ownership or inheritance is central in achieving bargaining power in farming families, knowing the ideology of the generation which will overtake the land is critical.

## Conclusion: Researching the Farming Family

Overall, the farming family remains to be an interesting topic of research. Its strategic adaptation to political, economic, cultural, and social changes continues to entice scholars from different fields. By critically looking at the studies done about farming families in Malaysia and the Philippines from 2000–2017, I present the following findings and recommendations:

First, there is an adjustment in the usage and definition of the family as it began to expand towards topics that are traditionally covered by kinship. This supports the argument for the importance of acknowledging the convergence in defining family and kinship. It should, however, be noted that the convergence began when the family changed its discourse towards post-structural, limitless definitions while at the same time kinship extended its relatedness to performances and technology beyond biological bases. Second, scholarly works on farming families have been refocusing from the gender division of labor towards identity politics vis-à-vis migration. The studies are, however, limited as they are inclined to look at the influence of land ownership and transfer in legal terms. This proves that the argument about the necessity of exploring contemporary sociocultural perceptions on the family farm is vital. Family relationships in this context are to be analyzed in terms of how the land plays a role in everyday life—in conversations, mundane activities, and decision making. Third, pieces of literature show economic and social development in the family from the perspective of dyad relations (husband-wife, wife-daughter, father-son), and only Carsten (1997) has looked into siblingship. I posit that although the development lens is useful in the study of farming families, it tends to miss out the smaller and more intimate relations confined in the home where families spend most of their time. Furthermore, although scholars are becoming interested in the youth's perspective and participation on farming, it seems that the role of extended family members who reside in the same house or community is not being given enough attention. This reinforces my argument for the importance of ensuring that scholarly works go beyond focusing on development approaches and dyad relations.

Given the above-mentioned findings, I recommend in further studies that a definition of how the family will

be used as a unit of analysis be presented clearly. This will also provide a limitation on the readers on how the scope of family and kinship will be applied. I also recommend that the ecological approach be considered in studying the role of the land in the strengthening or weakening of family relations. Questions can vary from the current family practices of land usage to the family traditions being maintained or modified or even to the decision in terms of passing down farming knowledge to the next generation. Lastly, I recommend that Agarwal's bargaining approach be extended to Southeast Asia. How do siblings (in the past and present) see the benefit of owning the land collectively or individually? How do they bargain with their parents or grandparents in terms of decision-making? How do seniority and generational positionality play a role? More questions will emerge as scholars continue to investigate the complex and interweaving relations that exist in farming families.

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