

Abortion and Infanticide in the Philippines during the Spanish Contact

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to prove that abortion and infanticide were part of the culture of the early Filipinos. I will try to demonstrate this through the use of original historical sources and documents still extant in our archives in the Philippines and abroad. The approach will be mainly historical.

Why were abortion and infanticide practiced in early Philippines? Where and for what reasons? What was the attitude of the early Filipinos towards life, fertility control and contraception? What were their customs, beliefs and methods used in procuring abortion and infanticide?

II. ABORTION AND INFANTICIDE: A WORLDWIDE PHENOMENON

That the practice of abortion and infanticide is not an uncommon phenomenon in the history of civilization is a well known fact. Man, in fact, from primitive society to our sophisticated one, has tried to control conception by a wide variety of methods. When he has failed to prevent conception, he has tried to interrupt pregnancy. When this has not succeeded, certain societies have resorted to abortion and infanticide.¹

¹ Sripati Chandrasekhar, *Abortion in a Crowded World* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1974), p. 21.

This was true with the Greeks who, on the basis of a well-ordered population policy, approved of abortion and infanticide as the most fitting remedy. To effect this policy, Plato (427-347 B.C.) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) forcefully preached all forms of population control from abortion down to infanticide. Both urged couples with many children, and aversed to expose them, to "let abortion be procured before sense and life have begun".² We read in another place: "offspring born of unlicensed mating, or deformed, are to be exposed and left to die"³ and "if the natural rate of increase is too high, the cruel practice of infanticide may be replaced by abortion".⁴

To achieve the ideal population for every state Plato's "model community" had to "restrict population within the means of subsistence."⁵ Aristotle recommended much harsher measures — abortion and death of unwanted babies through exposure — when his ideal "stationary population" could not be maintained through birth control alone as it was then known.⁶

Aside from Greece, the custom of exposing infants was also practiced in Rome, as shown by James J. Walsh.⁷

The same author states that, in Oriental countries, the practice of infanticide was done with an admixture of poetic and religious traditions that justified the custom of killing infants, especially female infants, because they were considered unproductive.⁸ He cites India, which continued this practice until the 19th century, despite the prohibition of the British Laws.⁹ He too mentions China, where delicate or deformed children were abandoned, or even healthy females, when males were found in the family.¹⁰

Joaquín Martínez de Zúñiga, O.S.A., wrote in his *Historia*:

"the inhuman custom of infanticide is not only practised

² Aristotle, *Politics*, VII, Chapter 16, in Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), p. 67.

³ Plato, *Republic*, 5, 461c, in Durant, *ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, VII, in Durant, *ibid.*, p. 67.

⁵ Plato, *Republic*, 5, 461c, in Durant, *ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶ Ernest Havemann, "Birth Control," in *Life International* (Sept. 1967), p. 21.

⁷ James J. Walsh, "Infanticide," *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: The Gilmary Society, 1913), Vol. VIII, p. 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

with impunity in China, but seems even countenanced as the readiest means of limiting a population which would otherwise be superabundant, and in time exceed the productive powers of the country."¹¹

During the period of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1608-1867) in Japan the practice of abortion and infanticide seems to have been fairly common. The practice reached such alarming proportions that the government was compelled to issue an official decree prohibiting both abortion and infanticide.¹²

Anthropological studies reveal interesting facts about the practice of infanticide in different parts of the world and the reasons that gave rise to it. The findings of these studies were published in *The Encyclopedia Britannica* and showed that infanticide was found to have arisen from the following reasons: first, from an act of callous brutality or satisfaction of cannibalistic cravings; second, as a result of the struggle for existence; third, from the nature of religious observances; fourth and last, from social or political motives.¹³

Citing Charles Darwin in his *Descent of Man*, from where abundant samples had been obtained, the studies showed that, in an act of brutality, a Figian dashed his child's brains for upsetting a basket of fish. Out of cannibalistic cravings, an Australian, seeing his infant son ill, killed, roasted and ate him. In some parts of Africa, the studies further disclosed, Negroes bait lion

¹¹ Joaquín Martínez de Zúñiga, O.S.A., *An Historical View of the Philippine Islands* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild) (FBG), 1966, p. 79, note 20.

Immediately after the quoted phrase above, Fr. Zúñiga adds this rejoinder: "By the narrative of Lord Macartney we learn that in the tract of country through which the embassy passed, the population appeared excessive; at the same time that cultivation and industry seemed to be extended to their utmost limits. All the accounts we possess of that extraordinary empire occur in this presentation. What effect the very pious application of the funds of the eleemosynary establishments at Manila may have reason to fear the practice is so general that any attempt to check it by this means might rather tend to stimulate the avarice of the parents, and produce an opposite effect. The Chinese are as yet but in a half-civilized state, and while they continue so we can entertain but slender hopes of any alternation more consistent with the feelings of humanity."

¹² Gabriel Pastrana, O.P., "Abortion in the Religions of Southeast Asia," *Unitas* (Dec., 1975), Vol. 48, No. 4, pp. 648-649. Cf. Neme Taueber, *The Population of Japan* (Princeton, 1958), p. 22, f.

¹³ *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, IIth Edition, (New York: The Encyclopedia Britannica Company: 1910), Vol. XIV, p. 516. The title of the published article is "Infanticide".

traps with their own children. Polynesian cannibals ate them without the excuse of periodic famines.¹⁴

In Polynesia, where struggle for existence was also due to its smallness, infanticidal custom was imposed to all families without distinction. In the Hawaiian Islands, all children, after the third or the fourth, were likewise strangled or buried alive. In Tahiti, fathers had a right to suffocate their newly-born children; the chiefs were obliged to kill their daughters. The Eskimos and Red Indians used to bury the infant with the mother who died in childbirth. Among the aristocratic Rajputs in India it was dishonorable for a girl to remain unmarried. If she ever married at all, it would not be below her caste, but her superior or equal. Since it was expensive for the bride's father to pay some rajahs the amount of 100,000 pounds for his daughters to get married, he killed his daughter to avoid this.¹⁵

Religious observances had it that children were to be offered as sacrifice to appease the gods, or children were burned to worship Moloch, or as in the case of India, they were thrown to the sacred Ganges River to pay adoration to the alligators. A male child was usually the victim for the sacrifice.¹⁶

The Spartans, Greeks, Romans, Eskimos and the Kamchadales killed their weakly or deformed children for social and political reasons. For similar motives the Tuski, Ahts, Western Eskimo and the Botocudos did likewise without distinction of sex. Sometimes they did so for some other reason, such as superstition on twin births.¹⁷

III. PHILIPPINE CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS

A. Abortion

1. *Attitude towards Life and Fertility*

Childhood betrothals were common practice in early Philippines. Marriages were contracted conditionally with the hope of having children. They became binding if they produced an off-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

spring. This shows that in marriage great emphasis was laid on the begetting of offspring. This ability to produce offspring lead, in turn, to the basic concept of "trial marriages" or "trial mating". Having achieved sexual and emotional compatibility there followed the test of fertility. No marriage could be sealed as a permanent union unless a man made a woman pregnant. An institution for this purpose was thus formed, called *ulog* by the Igorrots of the Mountain Province.

The *ulog* was and still is a place where young eligible girls sleep and receive their suitors. But special provisions were laid down before anyone could sleep with a girl in the *ulog*. That is, before a boy could sleep in the *ulog* with a girl, he must first court her and prove that he meant her well, that he prized her honor, and that he will marry her if she becomes pregnant; otherwise the young lad will become a social outcast and be barred from all the *ulogs* in his village.¹⁸

Should the union produce an offspring the man must go ahead with marriage. By the same token, inability to produce offspring was a valid ground for divorce. "When no child is born to a couple, the husband and the wife separate by mutual consent."¹⁹ However, in cases where the wife was childless but no divorce proceedings had been held, the husband was free to beget offsprings with another woman,²⁰ a similar practice to the Old Testament figures where Sarah, desirous of having a child of her own, permitted Abraham to have sexual relations with her girl-servant Hagar, who bore him Ismael (Gen. 16, 1-4).

Incidentally, however, it was always believed that when a woman could not conceive, even if it was due to the man's sterility or impotence (for the males were always believed to be virile and potentially fertile), she alone was blamed for the unfruitful marriage.

Trial marriages, therefore, could only be effective if children were thereby born. As an anthropologist puts it: "trial marriage

¹⁸ Gladys Zabilka, *Customs and Cultures of the Philippines* (Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc.) 1963, p. 63. June Prill-Brett, "The Ulog", *Filipino Heritage* Vol. 2 (1977), pp. 505-509.

¹⁹ Lourdes S. Dulawan, "The Ifugaos," *The Unitas*, Vol. 60 (June-September, 1977), p. 412. Prill-Brett, *op. cit.*, p. 509.

²⁰ Antonio Molina, *The Philippines Through the Centuries* (U.S.T. Book Series: U.S.T. Cooperative, 1960), Vol. I, p. 14.

is prohibited, pregnancy usually bringing forth a permanent union."²¹ Thus, fertility and the ability to bear children are the naturally considered conditions for marriage among our early tribes and these conditions are obviously a sign of a pro-life attitude.

2. *Fertility Control and Abortion*

Historically speaking it is extremely difficult, if not almost impossible, to determine the teachings of the early Filipinos regarding fertility control and abortion. Sufficient proof has been given with respect to the Greeks in their effort to control pregnancy and the birth of babies. Nothing of this sort can be found in early Philippines. Moreover, basing our approach from the Filipino pro-life attitude, it would seem that abortion and contraception would have never been taught. The early Filipinos had always been naturally desirous of having children and this for a variety of reasons:

A man desired to have a son whom he could call his own; a chieftain wanted a son to succeed him in his position; a farmer expected his children to help him till his lands; a mother needed daughters to help in her household chores; a tribe demanded young men to be trained as warriors; men desired children to continue the propagation of their own race. With this inherently natural desire to have offspring, any attempt to control fertility and procure abortion would contradict the Filipinos' attitude towards life.

On the other hand, it is equally undeniable that the early Filipinos procured abortion. This is an incontestable fact. Prior to the arrival of the Spaniards to the Philippines, we have no historical proof regarding the existence of abortion. There is no written historical evidence extant before the advent of Christianity. This is not to say that the practice of abortion did not exist. Unfortunately it existed, as we shall now see. Spanish writers and chroniclers were shocked and scandalized by what they considered a terrible and heinous crime.

A historical proof and eyewitness to it is Fr. Martín de Rada, one of the first five Augustinians who came to the Philippines in

²¹ Zabilka, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

1565. In an account referring to the Bisayans, he writes: "las mujeres solteras matan los fetos."²² In the Ilocos region this was also true for we read: "unmarried women who become pregnant generally committed abortion."²³

3. *Reasons for the Practice of Abortion*

As culled from the early historical documents, the following were considered as most important reasons for abortion:

1. "Women dislike to give birth many times, especially those who inhabit the towns near the sea, saying that in having many children they are like pigs, for which reason after having one or two (children), the next time they get pregnant, when they are already three or four months (with child), they kill the creature in their body and abort."²⁴

2. "Those who are not married are also accustomed to do this, when they are not married, although they do not have to answer for this to the man as they are unmarried and live with them in concubinage."²⁵

3. "It is common among all the Pintados that women in having one or two children, being pregnant, kill all the rest, especially among the principales, except for some who like to have children; similarly, among the unmarried women, in becoming pregnant, they usually kill the creatures."²⁶

²² "Carta del P. Martín de Rada, OSA, al P. Alonso de la Veracruz, OSA, dándole noticias de las costumbres, ritos y clases de esclavitud que hay en las Filipinas, con otras informaciones importantes de las Islas," in Isacio Rodríguez, *Historia de la Provincia Agustiniiana del Smo. Nombre de Jesús de Filipinas* (Manila; 1978), Vol. XIV, p. 481. Cf. José Montero y Vidal *Historia General de Filipinas* (Madrid, 1887-1895), Vol. 1, p. 62.

²³ Isabelo de los Reyes, *Historia de Ilocos* (Manila: Establecimiento tipográfico de la Opinión, 1890), Vol. I, p. 128. Cf. Juan A. Foronda, "The Establishment of the First Missionary Centers in Ilocos (1572-1612)," *Ilocos Review* (Jan.-Dec., 1970), Vol. 3, p. 53.

²⁴ Carlos Quirino and Mauro García, (Trs. & Annotators), "The Manners, Customs and Beliefs of the Philippine Inhabitants of long ago; being chapters of a 'Late 16th Century Manila Manuscript,'" *The Philippine Journal of Science* (Jan.-Dec., 1958), Vol. 87, No. 4, p. 413. Foronda, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "Carta" of Fr. Rada in Rodríguez, *Historia*, XIV, p. 481. The letter is dated "Calompit, 16 de Julio de 1577." The original observation runs as follows:

"Es común entre todos los pintados las mujeres, en teniendo uno o dos hijos, matar los demás, estando preñadas, en especial los principales, sino son algunos que son amigos de tener hijos, y también las mujeres solteras en estando preñadas, comúnmente matan las criaturas."

4. "All children are entitled to a share in the property of parents and that of the grandparents as well, if the latter's property has not been divided. The parents of a large family claim a greater share of their own parents' property; hence, a large family poses problems not only for the nuclear family involved but for parental siblings and their children as well. Abortion is then not only a concern of a wife and her husband but of all the bilateral kin whose share of inheritance might be smaller if more children were to share in the division of property."²⁷

Dislike to give too many births, fear of disgrace and shame, and poverty were powerful reasons for abortion. Basically, they spring from social, psychological and economic motives. These motives need to be explained further.

Viewed from the social point, the dislike to give too many births affords us the understanding of the early Filipinos' concept of family planning in relation to their economic living. There was the idea of increasing or reducing the number of the family in relation to their economic status. It boiled down to a concrete idea: whether one could really afford to maintain a family or not. Too many births created problems and ways and means to solve them were given, or at least attempted to. Too many births evidently brought an added burden to the community. Hence, there must be a limit to them. The most ideal size for the family which could easily be maintained was having one or only two children. More than this, it was considered a real burden, especially for the poor families who depended on hand-to-mouth existence. Thus the obvious and most ready answer to reduce the family size was abortion. Generally, and this is not a cause for surprise, the most prone to producing many children were usually the poor families and it was they who procured most frequently abortion. This was done to avoid extreme poverty.

For those who could afford to maintain a big family, there were no restrictions. This clearly expresses the pragmatic and utilitarian principle followed by the early Filipinos: as long as they could support a large family, it was good to go ahead with it. As part of their long established tradition, the Muslim tribes

²⁷ Edward P. Dozier, *Mountain Arbiters: The Changing Life of a Philippine Hill People* (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1966), p. 88.

in the Philippines were allowed to get married more than once and have plenty of children, as long as they had the necessary economic means to support them. Although polygamy was an accepted norm both for Filipino Muslims and non-Muslims, yet ordinarily, the early Filipinos married only one wife. However the *principales* usually had more than one wife.²⁸ For them, to have many wives was a source of power, authority and wealth.

As long as they were rich, they were free to maintain several families. We can see that the rich enjoyed both social and sexual privileges while the poor had only restraints. The early Filipinos had a peculiar understanding of family planning and a population growth: in the beginning, in order to increase population, many wives were needed. When population had increased considerably, control by abortion became the most expedient answer. The Bisayan *principales*, according to Fr. Rada, frequently did this.

From the psychological point of view, early Filipino women also felt the fear and shame of getting pregnant through force, like in the case of rape and incest. To save the family and oneself from shame and disgrace, the unmarried women resorted to abortion because it was considered a "disgrace for an unmarried woman to have children."²⁹

Rape and incest were rampant,³⁰ even in the early days of the Spanish conquest. Legaspi, in fact, complained to Tupas, chieftain of Cebu, that many women used to visit the Royal Camp at Cebu with much liberty and licentiousness.³¹ Later on, he learned that

²⁸ Vidal, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

²⁹ "Miguel Loarca, Relation of the Philippine Islands," in Emma Blair and Alexander Robertson, *The Philippine Islands* (Cleveland, 1903-1909), Vol. V, p. 119. Citation from this work will henceforth be abbreviated as *BR*. Cf. Pedro Gagelonia, *The Filipinos of Yesteryears* (Manila: National Book Store), Inc., 1967, p. 399.

³⁰ Gregorio Zaide, *Early Philippine History and Culture* (Manila: Far Eastern University, 1937), p. 45. Regarding the sexual laxity and commission of these sexual aberrations among ancient Filipinos, Zaide writes:

"It was in sexual relations where the ancient Filipinos appeared to be somewhat loose. Both laws and customs tolerated adultery if the culprits could afford to pay the offended party with gold. Other sexual crimes, such as concubinage, rape and incest, were not punished severely when they were not committed by a man of lower social rank upon a woman of higher rank."

³¹ With respect to impurity, lewdness and licentiousness of the early Filipinos, these can be explained on account of a superstitious belief that "virginity," Fr. Chirino remarks, "was not recognized or esteemed among

this practice was common in most Oriental countries. The parents themselves were, often times, taking much interest in the use and abuse of their own children.³² In Cebu, the Bisayan women, to save their own shame, resorted to abortion.³³

Abortion was not only procured out of shame, but also out of the idea that it would be unbelievable for a son to be without a father. Observes Fr. Rada:

"also it happens that the unmarried women (in the Visayas) will kill the *fetos*, not because of shame nor by punishment, not even by fear of not finding a man with whom to get married, but because they believe that it would not be possible to give birth to a son when he has no father."³⁴

them; rather they considered it as a misfortune and humiliation." *BR, op. cit.*, XII, p. 251

This is true regarding the observance of chastity and virginity among pagan filipinos; but this is not wholly true because, with the advent of Christianity, these practices had been corrected and we cannot fail to find that there were examples of women who were praiseworthy in such delicate matters. Christian religion had contributed much on this regard, so that Fr. Chirino himself later on would remark that "one of the greater results which we pride ourselves in is the reserve and virtue of the women, something not too widespread nor accepted when they were heathens." And in some other part, he further adds, that "it is a great joy to see the purity which shines in these girls." (Pedro Chirino, S.J., *Relación de las Islas Filipinas* (Manila: Historical Conservation Society, 1961), Vol. XV, pp. 52-53; 110; 141; 147; 170).

This is something which Father Casimiro Díaz later would re-echo when he talked about Filipino chastity in the 18th century: "those who do not know describe the Indians as quite lewd but I describe them as very chaste. If we Europeans were raised in the lack of restraint and manners of these poor people, we would see abominable things. It is useless to paint their nakedness, their way of living, their cramped houses, for I write of people before whom everything is open. And yet, we must praise their self-control, praise what they do not perform, be not scandalized at what they do. The remedy is not easy, because this whole disorder is due to their poverty. But something might be done, if within the narrow walls of their houses, some partition is put up by which, even if they could not be totally set apart, they could be stopped from seeing (things), the window through which misfortune is led in." (Casimiro Díaz, O.S.A., *Párroco de Indias Instruido* (Manila: Imprenta de la Compañía de Jesús, 1745), p. 111, as quoted by Fr. Pablo Fernández, O.P., *History of the Church in the Philippines (1521-1889)* (Manila: National Book Store, 1979), p. 144.

³² Evergisto Bazaco, O.P., *Culture of the Early Filipinos* (Manila: U.S.T. Press, 1936), p. 38. I know for a fact some who abused their own daughters and had children from them.

³³ *BR, op. cit.*, p. 119. Cf. Pedro Gagelonia, *The Filipinos of Yesteryears* (Manila: National Book Store, Inc., 1967), p. 399.

³⁴ "Carta of Fr. Rada," Rodríguez, *Historia*, IV, p. 481. Cf. Vidal, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

As we can see, it was considered a serious offense for unmarried women to have children. The solution was to kill the children born out of wedlock.³⁵

With respect to the property inheritance, the early Filipinos had been accustomed to share family inheritance with the children. Each of the children was entitled to an equal share of whatever property the family possessed. However, this distribution of the property depended on the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the children. By customary law, all the legitimate sons could inherit, whether or not there was any testament left by the parents. The failure of having sons would mean that the inheritance would go to the proximate relatives. The illegitimate sons could not inherit anything. But it was not unusual for a father to leave some property to his illegitimate children.³⁶

Restriction of children was, then, due to the hope of leaving behind children who could inherit the property of the parents and live well. Added to this were the problems springing from the biological and psychological hardships that women bore as mothers. Indeed, children might be a blessing. But if there were too many, they became a burden to the mother as well as to the whole family. For this reason, abortion was considered the easiest remedy. We read regarding the *Kalingas* of the Mountain Province:

"the Kalinga everywhere genuinely want children and . . . high separation and divorce rate is found among the couples in which the wife is unable to conceive in the first few years of marriage. While there is a desire for children, and a home without children is not considered the natural state of affairs among the Kalinga, Kalinga women also feel that too many children effect hardships on the mother. In the North, at least, some women who have too many children consult an abortionist In the region of Poswoy (Northern Kalinga), a woman who had eleven children, ten of them living, considered abortion for future pregnancies."³⁷

4. *Methods and Techniques Used for Abortion.*

The early Filipinos used primitive, painful and dangerous methods for abortion. Women followed old wives' tales about

³⁵ Antonio Morga, *Historical Events of the Philippine Islands* (Manila: Jose Rizal National Centennial Commission, 1962), pp. 287-288.

³⁶ Vidal, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

³⁷ Dozier, *op. cit.* p. 88.

drugs that produced abortion. No drug, however, had yet been made that could be taken by mouth to produce abortion. The folklore of some natives had recommended various charms, talismans, leaves, barks, roots and fruits to procure abortion.

The following, however, were the most common methods used by the early Filipinos: they employed the services of local midwives known in the vernacular as *hilot*.³⁸ These *hilots* administered a drink from an herb called *gallopot*,³⁹ an abortifacient. These knowledgeable women, after administering the drink from these herbs, employed massage to the stomach.⁴⁰ If they were not satisfied with the beverage from roots known to effect abortion, some women would place certain herbs on, and apply massage to, the stomach. Through this the creature would die and the woman would abort.

Women experts employed to procure abortion had a high reputation and developed strange concoctions for abortion. Some became medium, not by individual inclination or choice, but by being psychologically disposed to it. Kalinga women believed that mediums were selected by spirits.⁴¹

A study made on them reveals that:

"a woman thus 'called' exhibits peculiar food and behavior habits recognized by the Kalinga as summons to assume the role of a medium."⁴²

Other notable characteristics of these mediums are indicated by Dozier in his interesting study:

"In the regions visited, mediums are all women past the age of thirty. In Poswoy, a region of approximately five hundred inhabitants, informants reported that there were about a dozen mediums. In addition to mediums, women (3 were reported for Poswoy), became specialists in the treatment of women who have trouble in bearing children or who wish to abort after conception. These women are not midwives; the Kalinga apparently do not have midwives. Women of an extended household, usual-

³⁸ Armando J. Malay and P. Ch. Malay, *Our Folkways* (Manila, 1955), p. 4. Cfr. Dozier, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110.

³⁹ Dozier, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

⁴⁰ Quirino and García, *op. cit.*, p. 413.

⁴¹ Dozier, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

⁴² *Ibid.*

ly the mother, assist at childbirth. Should there be difficulty at birth, one of these childbirth specialists is called. The primary function of these women is then to help a barren woman conceive, to assist in difficult births, and to perform abortion.⁴³

In contrast with the Kalinga whose mediums are women past their middle age, in the province of La Union, most midwives were men. These village 'obstetricians' relied on local herbs, native concoctions, and brute force in helping a mother deliver the child. When the baby had some difficulty in coming out, the *hilots* used their muscles to force the child out. There had been cases where the babies were torn apart or suffered injuries at the hands of the *hilot*. Brute force remained the "best" means of ending a mother's pregnancy. The *hilot*, with the help of the husband, bore down on the mother's stomach and by sheer strength forced the foetus out.⁴⁴

5. Abortion Practices in other Regions.

Apart from the *Bisayans* and the *Kalingas*, the unwed *Tagalog* women were also wont to practice abortion.⁴⁵ Among the non-christian minorities, contemporary unwed *Tinggian* mothers practiced it occasionally. Abortion was also practiced by married and unmarried women of *Bontoc* who, for one reason or another, did not desire the child to be born.⁴⁶ In Southern Mindoro, terminating pregnancy by reason of poverty is practiced still today by the *Hanunoo*. Among the Bagobos of Davao abortion is prohibited, but it is nonetheless widely used. While the *Nabaloi* of Benguet claim never to destroy unborn children, the *Tiruray* of Cotabato consider the practice not repugnant. José Tenorio writes of the *Tirurays*:

"I will also tell my readers of another custom of bad Tiruray women. If they feel that there is a child in their belly, they kill it by pressing, or else they drink a potion

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

⁴⁴ Malay, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4, 12.

⁴⁵ Teresita R. Infante, *The Woman in Early Philippines and among the Cultural Minorities* (U.S.T. Press, 1975), p. 115.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* citing for the Tinggians, Fay Cooper Cole, "The Tinggian: Social, Religious, and Economic Life of a Philippine Tribe," *Field Museum of Natural History*, XIV (1922), p. 262; for Bontoc, Albert Jenks, *The Bontoc Igorot* (Manila: Bureau of Public Printing, 1905), p. 60.

to prevent the child from developing. This is also done when there is no fixed father. Likewise, those who just do not want to have a child, they drink medicine. Those who drink a potion really do not have a baby."⁴⁷

An interesting account is told by Benito Vargas, regarding ancient practices among the *Bicolanos*. The legend goes like this:

"When the wife of the chieftain was about to deliver — so an old tradition goes — the delivery was abnormal, difficult and extremely painful. The *herbolario* or sort of witch-doctor of the village who pretended to cure with hocus-pocus or mysterious potions suggested to open up the entrails of the woman to save the baby, though thus killing certainly the mother in stride. The chieftain asked for Fray Herrera's counsel, who told him that it was against the law of God to kill a person directly while it was not even certain that the life of the child would be thus spared. So the woman was not mangled; but unfortunately both she and her child died. The witch-doctor laid the blame on the Augustinian, and the chieftain, grief-stricken and infuriated, ordered Fray Herrera to dig a hole on the ground. When it was deep enough, the chieftain commanded his men to bury the priest alive in a standing position."⁴⁸

This tradition still alive among the *Bicolanos* of Catanduanes should be taken with a grain of salt. Historical sources tell us that when the ship *Espíritu Santo* sank close to Catanduanes, where a score of lay Spaniards drowned with it, Fr. Herrera — along with ten Augustinian priests recruited from Spain for the Augustinian mission in the Philippines — were able to go ashore but were robbed and cruelly killed by the natives.⁴⁹

6. Abortion: A Crime?

For the early Filipinos, abortion was not considered a crime. What was considered most serious was for an unmarried woman

⁴⁷ José Tenorio, "The Customs of the Tiruray People," *Philippine Studies*, 18 (1970), p. 411. For the Bagobo, see Fay Cooper Cole, "The Wild Tribes of Davao District, Mindanao," *Field Museum of Natural History*, XII (Sept., 1913), p. 101. Cf. Infante, *op. cit.*, p. 116, citing for the Hanunoo, Emeterio de la Paz's "A Survey of the Hanunoo Mangyan Culture and Barriers to Change," *Unitas*, 41:27, March, 1968.

⁴⁸ Fr. Benito Vargas, O.P., "Fray Diego de Herrera: Death in Batalay," *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas*, Vol. XLVII (1973), p. 677.

⁴⁹ Rodríguez, *Historia*, I. pp. 217-219.

to get pregnant. This was severely punished along with theft, insult, murder, rape, incest and the like. Antonio Morga said in his *Sucesos* that abortion was not considered a serious crime. It could be excused with less difficulty than the above mentioned offenses.

He said:

"Thefts were punished with severity. The thieves were made slaves. Sometimes they were sentenced to death. Oral defamations and insults uttered against the principals were severely punished. There was a list of many things and words considered extremely insulting and discrediting when uttered against men or women of which were excused with more difficulty than offenses committed against persons, or *injuries against their bodies* (underscoring mine)."⁵⁰

B. Infanticide

1. Reasons for Infanticide

As with abortion, various are the reasons given for the practice of infanticide. For some tribes, infanticide had to do with the children born with deformities.⁵¹ For others, illegitimate children were killed because they caused dishonor to the family.⁵² In some cases the birth of twins or similar births were attributed to diabolical influences, thus the children were killed.⁵³ In other cases, infanticide had to do with poverty. Children were killed to keep the number of births under control.⁵⁴

I shall give now the beliefs and attitudes of the early Filipinos on infanticide by regions. Thus I hope to present a more comprehensive study to my readers.

a. Ilocos Region

The earliest written records on the subject of infanticide was provided by Gaspar de San Agustín. He wrote in his *Conquistas*:

⁵⁰ Morga, *op. cit.*, pp. 287-288.

⁵¹ Molina, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁵² Angel Pérez, O.S.A. *Relaciones Agustonianas de las Razas del Norte de Luzon* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1906), pp. 241-242. Also see his other book, *Igorrotes; Estudio Geográfico y Ethnográfico sobre algunos Distritos del Norte de Luzon* (Manila: Imp. de "El Mercantil", 1902), pp. 356-358.

⁵³ Malay, *op. cit.*, p. 20

⁵⁴ BR, *op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 104.

"the Ilocanos have various superstitions. One of them is to kill a person born with its umbilical cord hanging around his neck because they say that he would be unlucky or would die very soon."⁵⁵

Isabelo de los Reyes, basing his conclusion on this statement, affirmed that infanticide was permitted and was not considered a crime.⁵⁶ De los Reyes claimed that it was the mother who perpetrated the crime. No one else would claim the dead child.⁵⁷

De los Reyes further recounts for us the legend of the survival of Pedro Bukaneg, considered as the Father of the Iloco literature. According to this legend, Bukaneg was found floating in the Abra River, which then separated Bantay from Vigan. Probably he was left there by his parents who did not have the courage to bury him alive, as it was the custom of the time.⁵⁸ A native woman (*india*) discovered Bukaneg. He was blind. She placed him inside a *tampipi* (trunk). This legend applied to Bukaneg has made him the "Philippine Moses".⁵⁹

b. Pangasinan

The custom of burying alive children born defective or blind was common in Pangasinan. A mother in Bacnotan (modern Dagupan) tried to bury her child born blind. She was prevented by a friar. When asked for the reason why she was going to bury alive her newly born child, she replied:

"that they had the custom of immediately burying alive any child born who was incapable of serving its parents, for in such case the latter had no interest or hope in living. For it was an arduous task to give them being, to bear them in travail, to rear them through childhood and support them all their lives, since such children could not require so many benefits."⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Gaspar de San Agustín, *Conquistas de las Islas Filipinas (1565-1615)* (Edición, Introducción, notas e índices por Manuel Merino, O.S.A., Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1975), p. 624.

⁵⁶ De los Reyes, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 3, J. Foronda, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* Cf. Marcelino Foronda, "Bukaneg and the early Books in Ilokan," *Ilocos Review*, Vol. 3 (1970), p. 87.

⁵⁹ Percy A. Hill, "Pedro Bukaneg — A 'Philippine Moses'", *Philippine Magazine* (March-April, May-June, 1954) found in M. Foronda, *ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

⁶⁰ Juan de Medina, O.S.A., *Historia de los Sucesos de la Orden de N.G.P.S. Agustín de estas Islas Filipinas* (Manila: Tipolitografía de Chopre y Comp. 1893, but written in 1630), p. 159. Cf. *BR, op. cit.*, vol. 23, pp. 290-292.

c. *Nueva Vizcaya*

Among the inhabitants of the large region called *Difun* (Southern Isabela) a newly born child, whose mother died, was usually put to death and buried with its mother so that it be not enslaved by its wetnurse.⁶¹ For the Bugkalots (Ilongots), male-twins were also buried alive because,

"the birth of a twin in a family is a taboo and a sign of bad luck not only for the parents but also for the whole tribe. A couple who begets twins is driven out of the village to live as outcasts. They are only allowed to return to the village when one of the twins dies and the living twin is buried alive with the dead one. It is the belief of the Bugkalots that a twin who survives will seize the power of his father by killing him. Therefore, male twins are unwelcomed and considered undesirable. Girl twins, however, are welcomed in the community because they do not wage wars."⁶²

d. *Mountain Province*

In *Bontoc*, believing that one of a pair of twins is an *anito* child, they bury the quieter or the larger one of the two in an earthen jar:

"The Bontoks of the Mountain Province do not like twins, believing that one of them is the child of an evil spirit or an *anito*. When the twins are born, they determine which baby is livelier or more robust than the other. That child will be allowed to live. The other one is not given much care so eventually it dies."⁶³

In *Kalinga*, they put to death all or almost all illegitimate children. The legitimate children suffered the same fate when they were deemed too many, or when the child was a girl since, according to Fr. de Medio, she would not be very useful for work.⁶⁴ The *Lepanto Igorots*, considering the birth of twins a supernatural

⁶¹ Julián Malumbres, *Historia de Isabela* (Manila 1918), pp. 45-46. Cf. Infante, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁶² Cesar Bilowan, "Love, Courtship and Marriage among Bugkalots of Luzon," *The Times Journal* (June 21, 1976), p. 17.

⁶³ Malay, *op. cit.*, p. 20. Jenks, *op. cit.*, p. 60. Infante *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁶⁴ Infante, *ibid.*, citing Pedro Nolasco de Medio, "Relación Sobre los Calingas," *Memoria of the Exposición General de las Islas Filipinas en Madrid* (Manila: Imp. de Sto. Tomas, 1887), p. 149.

phenomenon, got rid of one of them, usually, the second born, by either giving it to a family that wanted it or by strangling or burying it alive.⁶⁵ W. H. Scott writes of the Igorots in general:

"The offspring of any unusual birth — breech presentation or the umbilical cord looped over the neck, for example, or outright congenital deformities, were left to die exposed in a basket, because they had tried to kill their mother or would grow up handicapped or ill-fitted, although they could be saved by any outsider who would carry them away to raise elsewhere. Actual infanticide was practised, too, in the case of women giving frequent birth it interfered with their ordinary economic activities, in which cases no taboo was involved to prevent local adoption. It was a rare family that had as many as six children."⁶⁶

Scott's observation is a paraphrase of Fr. Pérez's findings in his *Relaciones and Igorrotes*:

Regarding birth of babies, they (the Igorots) have many vain observances, and because of these, they killed many of them. If they are sons of ill-mannered adulterers, they kill them because they cause dishonor to those who are born in legitimate marriage (they say). If they are born with feet coming out ahead, or even when the head is ahead but looped with the umbilical cord far from the normal way of delivery, one of these is killed for it appears that he had wished to take the life of his mother (they say); or that it is a sign by which he would later kill her when she grows old or when he becomes furious. They do not let those who are born blind or one-armed, or crippled live, for (they say) they would have a miserable life; and so it would be better to kill them . . . If there is any stranger who wants to take those babies destined to die, they can take them, but not if they belong to the same *rancheria*; if a woman gives birth oftentimes, they take away the life of some of them, for example, of the second, if he is smaller than the first, because he would not be able to care for him, for (they say) he would hinder the mother from finding the means of livelihood. If some people would like to take them, they would give them to them, whether they belonged to the same place or not."⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, citing Maximino Lillo de Gracia, *Filipinas: Distrito de Lepanto* (Manila: Imp. de Sto. Tomás, 1877), p. 25.

⁶⁶ William Henry Scott, *The Discovery of the Igorots: Spanish Contacts with the Pagans of Northern Luzon* (Quezon City: New Day Publisher, 1974), p. 189.

⁶⁷ Pérez, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-242; *Igorrotes*, p. 256-358.

In *Banawe*, Ifugao, infanticide was common. "After child-birth, babies are nursed for two years: if the mother dies during this period, the child is buried alive with her"⁶⁸ for it was believed, "no one would nurse her to let her grow."⁶⁹ In other parts of *Ifugao*, they also bury one of the twins in an earthen jar lest the mother be compared to a pig,⁷⁰ or, in accordance with their religious beliefs, to give it back to the spirits, because they consider it a spirit child or *anito* child. Lourdes Dulawan writes:

"Ifugaos do not have the slightest idea as to the cause of twins (*Mundapit*). They despise a woman who has twins (triplets and up are unthinkable) as they think only animals can have more than one offspring at a time . . . Some people believe that twins have but one life. When one gets sick, the other will also be. That is why most parents of twins want to kill one of the twins as soon as they are born, so that one will live. However, it is the belief of the undersigned that in the past, Ifugaos killed one of the twins because of shame since they believe that only pigs and other animals should have more than one offspring at a time."⁷¹

The Isnegs took the easiest way. They killed the two for they believed that one of them was the "unlawful offspring of some other man not the child of its mother's husband . . ." ⁷² In the *Sierras* and the *Cordillera*, the native *indios*, according to C. G. Nakpil were led to strangle their children because of excessive taxes.⁷³

⁶⁸ Alexander Schadenberg, "Tribes Living in the Interior of Northern Luzon," *German Travellers on the Cordillera (1860-1890)* (Manila): Filipiniana Book Guild, 1975), p. 142.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Infante, *op. cit.*, p. 20 citing Francis Lambrecht, "Ifugao Custom and the Moral Law," *Philippine Studies*, 10:295, April, 1962.

⁷¹ Dulawan, *op. cit.*, p. 405.

⁷² Infante, *op. cit.*, p. 20 citing Morice Vanoverbergh, "The Isneg Life Cycle, I. Birth, Education, and Daily Routine," *Publications of the Catholic Anthropological Conference*, III (March, 1936), p. 101.

⁷³ "Footnotes in History: RP Colonization was Business Problem," *Philippine Sunday Express* (July 25, 1976), p. 10. Part of Nakpil's article reads as follows: "Varios sources of revenues (tributes from encomiendas, licenses to Sangleys, fifth and tenths of gold collected from the natives, ecclesiastical tithes, fares on royal ships, fines, customs duties on Chinese and Indian goods, freight charges and other duties on exports) amounted to only P543,922 in spite of vigorous methods of collection which often led the native indios Filipinos to strangle their children or to flee to the Sierras and Cordilleras in desperation."

I was not able to trace where Nakpil gets her reference for none was indicated. But I suspected that she gets it from a wrong source and thereby

e. Tagalog Region

Among the *Tagalogs*, infanticide was practised especially by unwed mothers.⁷⁴ An old document entitled "Manila and the Philippines about 1650," states that after the baptism of an infant, he was simply "abandoned and thrown into the sea by its mother."⁷⁵

f. Visayas Islands

Among the *Bisayans*, it was the custom to limit children to one or two, the rest being put to death because Bisayan women did not deem it proper to have as many offspring as pigs.⁷⁶ Like the *Ilocanos*, the Bisayans, in their primitive concept of family

followed the same wrong interpretation. Apparently she may have used the 'Historia' of the Franciscan San Antonio or the account of the Jesuit Murillo, works that had been refuted by the Augustinian Zúñiga for the former had the wrong notion that women killed their children in order not to become subjects of the Spaniards. But this refers to the women of the *Marianas Islands*. Nakpil has wrongly applied this to the Philippines. Zúñiga writes:

"... the 'Historia' of the Franciscan and the account of Father Murillo say that the continuous decrease in population of these Islands in the XVII century is due to the fact that they kill themselves because of despondency. *Their women make themselves sterile or kill their new born after delivery so that they might not become subjects of the Spaniards* (underlining is mine). All of these reasons are fictitious, according to what the Spaniards who have lived in the Marianas Islands assured me and I believe them, because the reasons given for the decrease in population are false. Moreover, the Spaniards treated them so well that they were not asked to pay tribute or any other imposition, since the Recollect priests who administer them spiritually receive their stipends from Mexico. Who would believe that the decrease in the population of the Marianas is true when it is belied by two Spanish writers of Manila, one a Jesuit and the other a religious worker who is charged with the spiritual administration of those islands? Moreover, I do not believe it because I find in the same Franciscan 'historia' that there were only 2,697 souls in these islands in 1735 and that now there are 7,555 according to a report furnished me by the Recollect Fathers," *The Status of the Philippines in 1800*, (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1973, pp. 466-467)

In my opinion it is truer to believe that the natives fled to the Sierras and the Cordilleras to escape payment of taxes than to believe they strangled their children for being taxed vigorously. It would still be even truer to believe they strangled their children for superstitious reasons rather than due to taxation. To say the least, Nakpil's assertion is not based on history. She is guilty of historical fiction.

⁷⁴ Infante, *op. cit.*, p. 18. Quirino and García, *op. cit.*, p. 373.

⁷⁵ BR, *op. cit.*, vol. 37, p. 306.

⁷⁶ Infante, *op. cit.*, p. 18. Quirino and García, *op. cit.*, p. 362.

planning, considered that many children would inherit little and therefore be poor, while having one child only would be a rich heir.⁷⁷ Thus, Loarca writes that the *Pintados* (original name given to the Bisayans by the early Spaniards) are

“ashamed of having too many children because — they say — the parent’s wealth is divided among them all and so, it is better to have only one child who is rich than have many but poor.”⁷⁸

g. *Samar-Leyte*

In Ibabao, Northern Samar, infanticide was also practised. Children born physically deformed or handicapped were either drowned or buried alive.⁷⁹ In Alang-alang, Leyte, there was a pagan mother who, after giving birth to her new born baby, wanted to bury it alive “to escape the burden and labor which she must sustain in rearing it,” as related by Chirino.⁸⁰

h. *Bicol*

The *Bicolanos* of Camarines also limited the number of their children for reasons of future material well-being.⁸¹

i. *Butuan*

Ancient historical records tell us that in Butuan one twin, the weakest and thinnest of the pair, was thrown into the garbage.⁸²

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* Cf. *BR*, *op. cit.*, Vol. 5, pp. 104, 118.

⁷⁸ *BR*, *op. cit.*, vol. 37, p. 306; vol. V, p. 119. Cf. Bazaco, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁷⁹ Infante, *op. cit.*, p. 18, citing Pablo Pastells-Francisco Colín, *Labor Evangelica* (Barcelona: Imp. y Litog. de Henrich y Cía, 1900), p. 149, (Vol. II)

⁸⁰ Chirino, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-117. Cf. *BR*, *op. cit.*, vol. XIII, p. 51.

⁸¹ Infante, *op. cit.*, p. 18, citing Marcelo de Ribadeneira *Historia de las Islas del Archipiélago Filipino y Reinos de la Gran China, Tartaria Cochinchina, Malaca, Siam, Cambodge y Japón* (Madrid: Imprenta Sáez, 1947), p. 51.

⁸² *Ibid.*, citing Francisco Combés, *Historia de Mindanao y Joló* (annotated by W. E. Retana and Pastells, Madrid: Minuesa de los Ríos, 1897), p. 106.

j. *Mindoro*

The Buhil *Mangyans* of Mindoro considered one or two children enough. Apart from this, they used to bury any child born abnormally, or born about four days' distance from their home in the mountains. Unwelcome babies were destroyed.⁸³ In time of scarcity, the *Hampangan* Mangyans allowed infanticide. They even considered it praiseworthy.⁸⁴

k. *Davao*

The *Bagobos* of Davao, situated on the South and East of Mt. Apo and the west coast of Davao Gulf, also disposed of children born physically deformed and handicapped.⁸⁵ They easily accept twins but would kill all three children when triplets are born.⁸⁶

l. *Negritos*

The Negritos buried immediately the weaker twin, since it was going to die anyway.⁸⁷

m. *Zambales*

In his early relation of the Zambales in 1680, Fr. Domingo Pérez reported the following:

"We see an evil and perverse custom which they have which is worse than the most blood-thirsty beasts, namely, that Zambals are not accustomed to have more than two children, one a male and the other female. Consequently, if they already have one male child, they kill all the sons

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 70, citing Fletcher Gardner, *Philippine Indic Studies* (San Antonio, Texas: Palm Tree Press, 1943), pp. 69, 62.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, citing Merton L. Miller, "The Mangyans of Mindoro," *The Philippine Journal of Science*, VII (June, 1913), p. 150.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19. Cf. Combés, *op. cit.*, p. 663.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20. Cf. Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, citing John M. Garvan, *The Negritos of the Philippines* (ed. by Herman Hocchegger. Horn-Wein: Verlag Ferdinand Berger, 1964), p. 126. The Negritos are found scattered in small remote settlements of Samar, Panay, Bohol, Leyte, Mindoro, Mindanao, and from Rizal Province to Cagayan and Apayao along the Sierra Madre. The heaviest concentration of Negrito is found in the Bataan-Zambales highlands, especially around Mt. Pinatubo in Eastern Botolan, Zambales. Generally they are known as Negritos. Specifically, they may be called *ati*, *aeta*, *baluga*, *agta*, or *atta* depending on the localities they may be found in. Infante, *ibid.*, p. 8.

at birth until a daughter is born. Then after they have had said daughter, scarcely is the woman pregnant when they already arrange to kill the son or daughter, as soon as it emerges from the womb of its mother. But if any one begs said son or daughter, even while yet in the womb of its mother it is given to such person. But the one who has asked for it must pay its mother all the time that the said mother is occupied in suckling such boy or girl; and afterward it is considered as the child of that person at whose account it was reared and kept alive. However, I know many in this manner who have great love for their true parents."⁸⁸

Fr. Vicente Salazar, in his *Historia* of 1742, writes:

"In Zambal villages around 1683, there was a native named Tomas Calignao from the village of Aglao, two leagues away from Balacbac, and was a Christian from his childhood, although of Christian he had only the name; for his life and habits were worse than those of the heathen. He never heard mass, and made confession; he observed neither human nor divine nor even natural law; for his only endeavor was to cut off heads — even if they were those of children or women — without further cause or motive than his craving to kill for the sake of killing."⁸⁹

2. Methods of Infanticide

As we have seen, there were different methods used by ancient Filipinos in order to bring about the death of unwanted children. These methods were burying them alive, abandoning them to death, drowning them in the river or at sea, or simply strangling them instantly. Rituals connected with those to be buried are however of great interest.

The rituals used by the *Igorots* are vividly described by Fr. Perez in this manner:

"The way they kill them (infants) is to put them immediately after birth in a basket, make a hole in the ground and leave them there. After three days they return to the said hole and if they find that the creatures

⁸⁸ Domingo Perez, O.P., "Relation of the Zambals (ms. 1680)," in *BR, op. cit.*, vol. 47, p. 312.

⁸⁹ Vicente Salazar, O.P., "Historia de la Provincia del Santo Rosario de Filipinas (Manila, 1972, pp. 300-311), in *BR, op. cit.*, vol. 38, p. 230.

still live, they bury and cover them with soil, thus killing the creatures inside."⁹⁰

The rituals of the *Pintados* are more elaborate, as described by Fr. Rada:

"When they have the children, they take them and kill them inside a jar and then prepare a banquet where they invite the neighbors to the burial, and then they bury them alive or throw them down to the river."⁹¹

Placing the infants in a jar to let them die was common practice. However, as Molina would put it, in some cases the mouths of defective babies were "stuffed with ashes to procure their death or they were simply buried alive together with their dead mother."⁹²

3. *Infanticide: a Crime?*

Just as abortion was not considered a serious crime, so it was with infanticide. In fact, it was permitted. Although it was permitted not all however practised it. As a matter of fact, in *Purao*, for example, people were opposed to it. "These people", as one reliable source would put it, "do not kill their children, as do the people of Pangasinan."⁹³ Moreover, infanticide seemed to be more common among the slaves, as they were sacrificed at the death of their masters or chiefs in the belief that they would still serve such master even in the other life. The *Boxer Codex* clearly describes this:

"they kill some of the slaves of the dead, in the same way he (master) had died; that is, if he was drowned they also drown the slaves in the water; and if he had died from a stabbing, they kill them by stabbing; in that way they died in the same manner as their master. If he dies from some sickness, the slaves are drowned or buried alive, saying that it is necessary to do this that the slaves

⁹⁰ Pérez, *Relaciones*, pp. 241-242; *Igorrotes*, pp. 356-358.

⁹¹ "Carta del P. Rada," Rodríguez, *Historia*, XIV, p. 481. Vidal, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

⁹² Molina, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁹³ *BR*, *op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 107.

who are killed in the manner we have said may go to the other world to serve their masters."⁹⁴

4. Filipino "Codes" on Infanticide

Customs, in all certitude, are the basis of all unwritten laws among the early Filipino tribes and even among the present tribes and other minorities as well. As they gradually developed, some customs prevail over the others. In the course of time, those that are weak and less significant are changed, others simply disappear. While some customs evolved, the old and significant ones are retained. And those that are retained, because they are dominant, have acquired, in the process of development, the binding force of law and for the tribes they become eventually customary laws. When in the course of time they come to be written and codified and henceforth approved by the tribes, they automatically become tribal, or community, or village's laws.

"Codes" are believed to have existed in the Philippines, although their authenticity is very questionable. The case at hand are the alleged "Codes" of "Maragtas", "Sumakwel" and "Calantiao". These "Codes" were purportedly written in Panay in 1225, 1243 and 1250 respectively. Some historians of our day still believe and continue to use, in their historical books, these so-called "codes", acclaimed to be the oldest ever written. We know for a fact that their historicity has been put to the rigorous test of historical criticism. And we now also know that the three "codes" have not passed this critical historical test. These are fake and invented.

William Henry Scott,⁹⁵ closely studying the historical authenticity of these "codes", came up with a devastating conclusion: these "codes" are not authentic. He based his conclusion on two most unassailable assertions: the first, it would be impossible to

⁹⁴ Gagelonia, *op. cit.*, p. 412. Cf. Vidal, *op. cit.*, p. 58. Vidal, for his part, describes this slave sacrifice in this manner:

"al morir un noble le sacrificaban cierto número de esclavos... a este propósito dice el P. Rada que los visayas ponian en su fosa esclavos vivos para que le fuesen a servir a la otra vida."

This citation from Rada is found in Rodríguez, *Historia*, XIV, p. 480 in which Fr. Rada said: "Muerto el principal, enterrauan con el esclavos vivos para que le fuesen a servir a la otra vida."

⁹⁵ William Henry Scott, *A Critical Study of the Pre-Hispanic Source Materials For the Study of Philippine History* (Doctoral Dissertation, U.S.T., 1968), pp. 147-174; 224-229.

believe that such documents, written on bamboo and leaves, could have remained intact in the humid climate of the Philippines; second, that the documents' historical dates and foundations, being deliberately tampered with, are spurious and ridiculously inconsistent. The rigorous historical methods applied by Scott to these questionable documents dispelled all doubts concerning many confusing facts whose accuracy had long been assumed. Scott has proven that there never was a "Code of Calantiao" for there never was a man named Calantiao. These "codes" in the least, were no older than 1907 or 1914. He attributed to Pedro Montecarlo the original creation of the Maragtas "code", which the author originally published in Iloilo in 1907.

Despite the correctness of Scott's historical findings, on the basis of external and internal evidence, he nevertheless accepts the possibility that some of the contents of the "codes" may give us valid "cultural information." He believed that social customs are reflections of actual events in the life of the early Filipinos. We have dealt with these "codes" for they treat with some laws regarding abortion and infanticide.

The "code" of Maragtas says:⁹⁶

"a) the poor family cannot have more than two children because they will be a burden to the community.

b) the children who cannot be supported by their parents shall be killed and thrown into the river."

"if a man had a child by a woman and runs away from her, the child shall be killed, for it is difficult on the part of the woman, without a husband, to bring up a child . . . the man, if caught and refuses to marry the woman, shall be killed together with the child and be buried together in the same grave."

We read in the "code" of Sumakwel:⁹⁷

"Poor persons shall not have more than two children; children of the poor in excess of the two in number, shall be killed or thrown into swift rivers;

⁹⁶ Pedro Gagelonia, *The Filipinos of Yesteryears* (Manila: National Bookstore, 1973), p. 97.

⁹⁷ Delfin Fl. Batacan, "A Code of Crimes Since 1250 A.D.," *Philippine Panorama* (Sunday Magazine of the Bulletin Today), (May 30, 1976), p. 12.

"if the man is not found, the illegitimate child shall be killed: if the man is caught and he does not marry the woman, he shall be killed first and then the illegitimate child shall be killed and they shall both be buried in one grave."

These citations prove that infanticide was practiced among the people of Panay. Monteclaro, the man who faked and invented the "codes" at the beginning of this century, knew of the reports of Spanish writers of the so-called contact period. If we study the reports of Rada, Chirino, Loarca and many others after them, we see that Monteclaro took inspiration in them. The condition of poverty, the excess of children, the birth of illegitimate children are common elements found in Monteclaro's observations and in that of the older chroniclers. The methods of infanticide, like throwing children into rivers or seas or burying them alive are common to Monteclaro and to the early chroniclers, although in Monteclaro, the manner of phraseology seems too harsh an legalistic. Everything proves that infanticide was a common social custom in Panay.

c. *Missionary Interventions*

As far as abortion is concerned, we do not have clear *historical* indications that the Religious missionaries intervened against this practice. It is possible that they preached against it, but we can not be definite about this. The case of Fr. Diego de Herrera's intervention against abortion in Batalay, Bato, Catanduanes is a historical fiction. During the contact period, and after the first few generations of the Spanish era, the Filipinos still continued practising abortion. As Christianity spread and more people embraced it, probably the practice of abortion disappeared. It continued to be practiced among the people who were outside the Spanish sphere of influence. Thus we read in the *Boxer Codex* (around 1590) :

"They (the people of Cagayan) consider it a dishonor for an unmarried woman to give birth, and they kill the offspring as do the Bisayans; although among the married women it is no affront to have many births which they think it is good and thus they do not abort or kill the offspring as we have said the married Bisayans do"⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Felipe Landa Jocano, *The Philippines at the Spanish Contact* (Manila: 1975), pp. 198-199; 28; 82; 230-231.

With respect to infanticide, there are several cases in which the missionaries intervened against it. Fr. Pedro Chirino, in his *Relación de las Islas Filipinas*, describes an event that happened in Alang-Alang, Leyte, to Fr. Tomás de Montoya, S.J. the missionary of the district. We read:

“the goodness and mercy of God were seen in the case of a new born baby whose pagan mother — an inhabitant of another village, far distant — gave birth to it in a village of that mission. To escape the burden and labor which she must sustain in rearing it, she took it in the arms and descending to the bank of a river, was about to bury it alive. A Christian chanced to see her and hastened to inform us. Upon reaching the spot I found the child, so small that it was a cause for astonishment. I baptized the child, and it soon passed away to the eternal rest of which the imprudent mother had recklessly tried to deprive it.”⁹⁹

Another interesting incident was recorded by Fr. Juan de Medina, O.S.A., in Bacnotan, (Dagupan) Pangasinan in 1593. Pedro de la Cruz, the missionary in charge, was able to save a baby girl from being buried alive by her own mother simply because she was born blind. Let us offer Medina's own words:

“At this time a wonderful miracle happened in the Province of Ilocos, whose memory endures today. It was as follows. Among the religious who were going to the Filipinas went Father Pedro de la Cruz, to whom our Lord gave much of his Spirit, and who was called commonly the “Apostle of the Philippines”, and through him the Lord worked many wonderful miracles. The province of Pangasinan fell to this religious and holy man. This servant of God then, being in a village of their province called Bacnotan saw an Indian woman carrying a baby, whom she had given birth. The religious was doubtless moved by the spirit of heaven. The Indian woman answered that she was taking the baby to bury her alive, for she had been born blind! . . . No arguments availed to persuade the Indian woman to the contrary, until the holy man made an agreement with her, namely, that she should give him the child, and that he would rear her and support her as his own daughter. With this argument, the mother gave the child to Father Pedro de la Cruz, and he entered the convent with his own daughter. He got a

⁹⁹ Chirino, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-117.

woman to nurse her at the price of four reales per month, and then with his right as father, set about baptizing her. He did so, and it was our Lord's pleasure, for the credit of His servant, the value of holy baptism and His own glory, and likewise so that devilish custom should cease, that, as soon as their infant received the water of holy baptism, she gained her sight, although she had indeed been born blind."¹⁰⁰

In the biography of Fr. Pedro de la Cruz, Jorde writes:

"Fr. Pedro de la Cruz, moved with pity for that poor creature, baptized her in the presence of the principals of the region who, at the instance of the miracle of baptism, accorded the Holy Religious the greatest respect. Eventually they began asking him for baptism, together with the majority of the people living in the bordering towns."¹⁰¹

The custom was widespread, and from the point of view of the Gospel, it was a tremendous crime. The missionaries were alarmed. They fought against it at all times. Father Diego Alvarez, the provincial, took definite action. He ordered all his ministers in the Ilocos region to exert all their efforts in eradicating, once and for all, this vicious practice. Fr. Grijalva writes in his *Crónica*:

"The Father Provincial gathered sufficient information about such a marvelous event. Having informed the ordinary about it, and seeing that the miracle was of great help to the region, he ordered that the information be published and that in all occasions all the ministers should preach against and take care of extirpating the custom of burying alive those creatures who were born blind. Through this way he was able to eradicate that criminal vice, so that no trace of it is found any longer in those provinces."¹⁰²

In the first decade of the 18th century, another Provincial of the Agustínians, Fr. Aparicio, related the same custom among

¹⁰⁰ Medina, *op. cit.*, p. 159. *BR, op. cit.*, Vol. 23, pp. 290-292.

¹⁰¹ Elviro Pérez Jorde, *Catálogo Bibliográfico de los Religiosos Agustínios de la Provincia del Santísimo Nombre de Jesús de Filipinas* (Manila: 1901), p. 36.

¹⁰² Juan de Grijalva, O.S.A., *Crónica de la Orden de N.P.S. Agustín en las Provincias de Nueva España* (Mexico, 1624), fol. 205. Cr. Jorde, *ibid.*, note 1.

the Tinguians, the non-Christian natives of Abra. The provincial related the story to Fr. Martínez de Zúñiga. Zúñiga includes this story in his *Estadismo*:

"The Augustinian Provincial (Fr. Manuel Aparicio, present provincial of the Augustinian Order) related to me another barbarous custom of the Tinguians; the case of a child being buried with the mother if she dies at childbirth. On one occasion, wives of the tribal heads, out of compassion, were able to hide a girl and prevent her from being buried with her mother who died during delivery; they were able to bring her up in the Christian religion. Her brothers later found out about it, recognized her as a member of the family, and visited her often when she grew up, because she was better off than they. Father Aparicio used this incident to persuade the brothers to become Christians like their sister, and gave them books so that their might learn more about the catholic religion."¹⁰³

The Dominicans, in their mission field of Bataan and Zambales, intervened forcefully against the practice of infanticide. Many babies were saved at the last moment. In his *Relation of the Zambals*, Fr. Pérez writes:

"Since we discovered said custom among them, we had delivered from death three children, although to the great sorrow of their parents because they had not killed them. But as soon as we find out that any woman is pregnant, we warn her that she must not kill the son or daughter that she brings forth, for we will punish her very severely, and they, for fear of punishment, allow their children to live."¹⁰⁴

The concerted efforts of the missionaries paid off in many ways, yet they did not totally succeed in uprooting this practice. Some tribes still continue to practice it today. Christianity has played a tremendous role in the struggle for life. If not for this stand infanticide could have reached alarming proportions, similar to what happened in China, Japan and India, where there respective governments felt compelled to decree strict laws against what they considered a disconcerting social custom.

¹⁰³ Zúñiga, *Status* . . . , p. 401.

¹⁰⁴ *BR, op. cit.*, Vol. 47, p. 312.

Christianity has always considered infanticide a very serious crime. For the missionaries, it was plain murder. It was something horrible.

IV. CONCLUSION

Abortion and infanticide are not uncommon phenomena in the history of civilization. We have seen, as point of comparison, this practice even among people of advanced civilizations. The case of the Philippines is not an isolated phenomenon.

In the Philippines, as we have seen, the early Filipinos resorted to abortion and infanticide for a wide variety of reasons. Abortion was procured for reasons of incest, rape, pregnancy of unmarried girls. Having children born of illegitimate pregnancy was considered a disgrace. They practiced abortion and infanticide to ensure the physical health and sheer survival of a mother after giving so many births. They resorted to infanticide because of excess of children, of poverty, or because children were born defective, deformed, or simply out of superstition.

While abortion and infanticide were not considered as crimes, not all however were inclined to the practice. There were people who tried to protect infants from death and there were people unwilling to kill their own children.

The zealous and careful vigilance of the missionaries saved many children from death. The program of adult religious instructions prevented parents from continuing to practice the custom. With their conversion to Christianity, the practice practically disappeared, except among the people of the Mountain Province and other Filipino cultural minorities.

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